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THE WAR IN THE FAR EAST 1941-1943

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PACIFIC HELL
THE WAR IN THE FAR EAST
1941-1943

The attack by Japanese carrier-borne aircraft on the US Pacific Fleet base at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, stunned the world. All eight American battleships that formed the backbone of the Pacific Fleet were either damaged or destroyed, along with 11 other vessels and more than 300 aircraft. This pre-emptive strike was only the first stage in Emperor Hirohito's plan to seize territories across the Pacific which would enable Japan to acquire the raw materials it needed to maintain the war and dominate East Asia.

Japanese forces seized Wake Island, Guam and the British colony of Hong Kong before the end of 1941, and in the early months of the following year the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), Malaya, Singapore, and Burma also fell. But rather than seeking to reach a peace deal as the Japanese had hoped, the Allies fought back with just as much relentless determination as the Japanese had shown.

After heavy and embarrassing defeats, which included the loss of the pride of the Royal Navy, HMS *Prince of Wales*, and the surrender of 80,000 British and Commonwealth troops in Singapore, as well as the disastrous Battle of the Java Sea, in which five Allied cruisers were sunk, and a similar result at the Battle of Savo Island, which still stands as the US Navy's worst defeat, the fightback began. The Japanese advance across the Pacific was halted at the Battle of the Coral Sea, and at Midway Island, the Japanese aircraft carrier force which had attacked Pearl Harbor was destroyed.

The Japanese were driven out of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, and the British Army started offensive operations in Burma. Slowly, the tide was beginning to turn. During the Battle of the Bismarck Sea in March 1943 most of the Japanese naval task force was destroyed along with hundreds of aircraft and aircrew.

Though the war in the Pacific would grind remorselessly on for another two terrible years, it was clear that there could only be one outcome – the utter defeat of Imperial Japan.

John Grehan

John Grehan
Editor

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The battleship USS *California* sinking as a result of bomb and torpedo damage during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. (US Navy)

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20 ASIA FOR THE ASIATICS

The Japanese hoped to secure control of a large area of East Asia and drive the Western nations out of the region.

28 DISASTER AT SEA

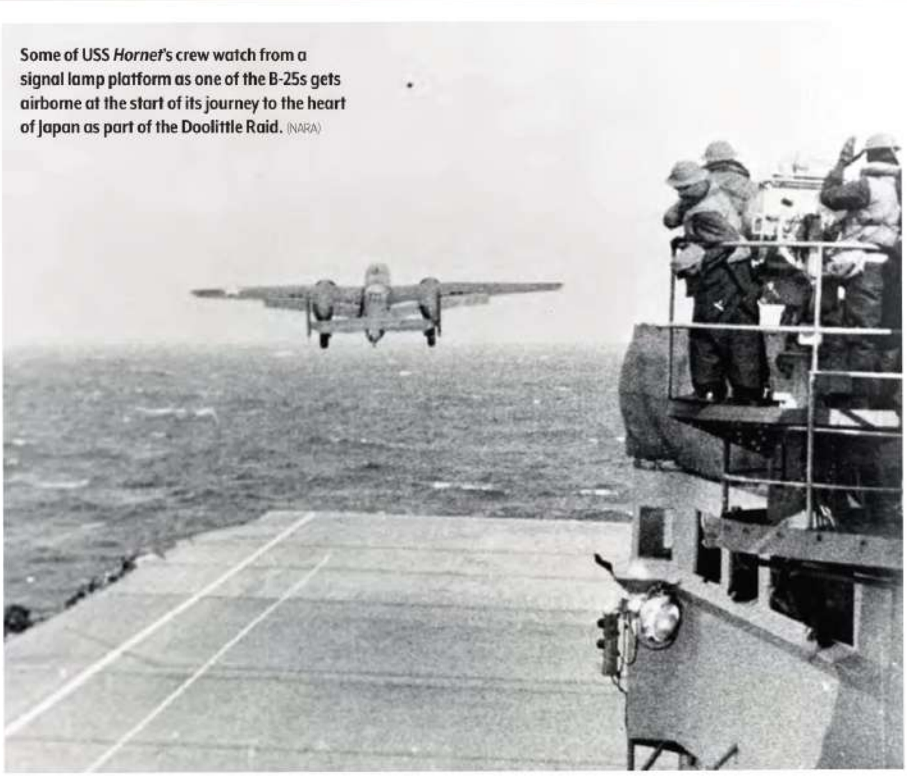
HMS *Prince of Wales* was the first capital ship ever to be sunk by naval air power on the open sea.

34 FAILURE IN THE PHILIPPINES

American and Filipino forces were still taken by surprise when the Japanese attacked the Philippines.

44 SINGAPORE SURRENDER

On 15 February 1942, the British Army suffered the heaviest defeat in its history, when Lieutenant-General Arthur Ernest Percival surrendered Singapore.



Some of USS *Hornet*'s crew watch from a signal lamp platform as one of the B-25s gets airborne at the start of its journey to the heart of Japan as part of the Doolittle Raid. (NARA)

54 BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA

The Dutch East Indies was the world's fourth largest exporter of oil and, therefore, one of the main Japanese targets.

60 RETREAT FROM RANGOON

When the Japanese attacked, the troops in Rangoon were forced to withdraw in what was to become the longest retreat in the history of the British Army.

On the night of 11/12 October 1942, Japanese naval forces, bound for Guadalcanal, encountered an American force. The resulting engagement, known as the Battle of Cape Esperance and depicted in this painting, resulted in a partial American victory. (USNHHC)

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The first offensive operation by the US Navy's Pacific Fleet took place on 1 February 1942, just eight weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

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On 19 February 1942, a force of 242 Japanese aircraft bombed the city of Darwin. Australia was now under direct attack.

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At the darkest time of the war President Roosevelt called for a forceful response, resulting in the Doolittle Raid on Japan itself.

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The Japanese sought to continue their success, but the Allies were determined to stop them. The result was a naval battle, the like of which had never been seen before.

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NARROW BRIDGE

Japanese troops march into Hong Kong, December 1941.
(Historic Military Press)

Fires burn on the aircraft carrier USS *Yorktown* after it was hit during the Battle of Midway.
(USNHHC)

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On 3 June 1942, Japanese forces launched an offensive in the Aleutian Islands which led to the occupation of parts of Alaska.

92 MIDWAY: THE UNPARALLELED VICTORY
On 4 June 1942, the Japanese suffered a defeat that changed the course of the war in the Pacific in favour of the Allies.

101 GUADALCANAL
Eight months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States undertook its first amphibious offensive operation in the Pacific.

110 THE END OF THE BEGINNING
The defeats at Coral Sea, Midway and Guadalcanal had wrecked Japan's strategic plans, but more disasters were to follow.

NOVEMBER 1941

26 The Japanese First Air Fleet set sail from the Kurile Islands bound for Pearl Harbor. The force consisted of more than 30 vessels, including six aircraft carriers.

DECEMBER 1941

7 The Japanese First Air Fleet launched its attack upon the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. Four battleships were sunk; 15 other vessels were sunk or damaged. Almost 350 aircraft were also destroyed or damaged.

8 Two Japanese divisions invaded Thailand and struck south into Malaya.

8 Three Japanese infantry regiments launched their assault upon Hong Kong from mainland China.

8 Japanese aircraft bombed Wake Island.

8 Japanese land-based aircraft from Saipan Island attacked Guam.

8 The Japanese 14th Army began landing troops on Bataan Island in the Philippines and bombers from Formosa carried out an attack on Clark Field, Manila, catching most of the US aircraft on the ground.

9 Japanese forces captured Bangkok.

9 Japanese troops landed on Tarawa and Makin in the Gilbert Islands.

10 The battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* were sunk by Japanese aircraft.

11 Japanese forces attempted a landing on Wake Island and, despite having suffered three days of bombardment, the US troops repelled the attackers.

12 Japanese troops landed on Luzon, the largest island of the Philippines.

16 The Japanese 19th Division landed on the northern coast of Borneo.

19 Japanese forces crossed Kowloon Bay to land on Hong Kong island.

19 British forces abandoned the fortified Malayan island of Penang.

WAR IN THE FAR EAST TIMELINE

A timeline exploring the key events in the Far East and the Pacific between 1941 and 1943.

A Japanese Type 99 Val shipboard bomber dives towards USS *Hornet* on the morning of 26 October 1942, during the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands. This aircraft struck the carrier's stack and then her flight deck. Another Japanese aircraft can be seen flying over *Hornet* after dropping its torpedo, whilst another Val is off her bow. (US Navy)

A Japanese field gun in action during the Luzon Campaign, part of the invasion of the Philippines, in December 1942. (USNHHC)

21 British troops abandoned defensive positions on Malaya's River Perak.

23 General MacArthur ordered US and Filipino troops to withdraw into the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines.

23 First Japanese air raid on the Burmese capital, Rangoon.

24 The US garrison of Wake Island finally surrendered.

25 The British garrison in Hong Kong surrendered.

28 Japanese paratroopers were dropped on Sumatra.

JANUARY 1942

2 Elements of the Japanese 14th Army entered and occupied Manila as well as captured the Cavite US naval base.

7 The Indian 11th Division was destroyed at the Battle of Slim River as the Japanese continued their advance through Malaya.

8 The Japanese occupied the capital of British North Borneo, Jesselton.

11 Japanese troops entered the capital of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

20 More than 100 Japanese carrier-borne aircraft bombed the port of Rabaul, New Britain.

22 The Japanese achieved a significant victory at the Battle of Muar, the last major engagement of the Malayan campaign.

26 British and Commonwealth troops started their withdrawal across the Johore Strait to Singapore.

FEBRUARY 1942

1 US carrier-borne aircraft attacked Japanese possessions in the Marshall and Gilbert islands.

4 Two Allied cruisers were damaged by Japanese bombers at the Action of Madura Strait, Dutch East Indies.

15 Japanese forces occupied Palembang and seized the nearby Royal Dutch Shell oil refineries.

15 Lieutenant General Percival surrendered Singapore. Approximately 80,000 British and Commonwealth troops were taken into captivity.

23 The 17th Indian Division was defeated at the Battle of Sittang Bridge, opening the road to Rangoon.

28 The Battle of the Java Sea ended with defeat of the Allied naval forces.

Japanese tanks and infantry on the streets of Tayabas, after the Japanese landings on Luzon in the Philippines, in December 1941. (USNHHC)

MARCH 1942

1 Japanese troops occupied the Dutch naval base at Surabaya.

3 Broome, in Western Australia, was bombed by Japanese aircraft.

8 Japanese forces landed in the Huton Gulf, New Guinea.

8 Rangoon fell to the Japanese.

12 General MacArthur left the Philippines to take up the role of Supreme Commander, Southwest Pacific Area, in Darwin, Australia.

23 The Japanese occupied the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal without resistance.

Amphibious shipping and landing craft off the Guadalcanal invasion beaches on the first day of landings there, 7 August 1942. (USNHHC)

APRIL 1942

1 Japanese troops captured the Island of Buka in the Solomon Islands.

2 The Japanese 15th Army seized the town of Prome on the River Irrawaddy north of Rangoon.

6 Japanese forces landed at Bougainville, the largest of the Solomon Islands, and also on the Admiralty Islands.

9 The remaining US troops on the Bataan Peninsula surrendered. The following day some 60,000 to 80,000 American and Filipino soldiers began a sixty-mile forced march to the San Fernando railhead.

18 Sixteen US B-25 Mitchell bombers flew from the carrier USS *Hornet* in a successful attack upon Tokyo and its environs. None of the aircraft were able to return.

19 British troops retreating through Burma reached Meiktila in central Burma.

US Marines setting up a camp on a ridge near the front line on Guadalcanal, 23 November 1942. (UNHHC)

25 US troops landed on the Free French colony of New Caledonia and its capital, Nouméa, became an important American naval base.

30 British forces in Burma were given permission to withdraw into India.

MAY 1942

1 Mandalay was taken by the Japanese 18th and 56th divisions.

3 Japanese forces invaded Tulagi in the British Solomon Islands. US and Australian warships moved to protect Port Moresby and on 7 May engaged the Japanese fleet at the Battle of the Coral Sea.

6 The US defenders on Corregidor surrendered and almost 12,500 American and Filipino personnel become prisoners of war.

8 The Battle of the Coral Sea, the first naval engagement in history in which aircraft carriers engaged each other, as well as the first in which the opposing ships neither sighted nor fired directly upon one another, ended. Both sides lose two fleet carriers.

22 US intelligence revealed Japanese plans for attacks on Midway Island and the Aleutian Islands.

23 Stilwell's troops withdrew into India and the Japanese completed the conquest of Burma.

JUNE 1942

1 Three Japanese midget submarines were sunk during an attempted attack upon shipping in Sydney Harbour.

3 The Battle of Midway began.

5 Japanese forces landed unopposed on Attu Island in the Aleutians, followed two days later by the occupation of Kiska Island.

7 The Battle of Midway ended with the Japanese having suffered a major defeat, losing four fleet carriers and almost 250 aircraft.

8 Japanese submarines shelled Sydney and Newcastle in New South Wales.

24 Six hundred Allied PoWs begin work on what will become known as the 'Death Railway' linking Singapore with Bangkok.

JULY 1942

4 US submarines sank four Japanese destroyers off the Aleutian Islands and on 21 July sank a further three.

21 Elements of the Japanese 18th Army landed in Papua in a renewed bid to take Port Moresby.

AUGUST 1942

7 The US 1st Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal in the first major Allied offensive of the war in the Pacific.

The cruiser USS *Minneapolis* pictured with extensive torpedo damage received in the Battle of Tassafaronga on 30 November 1942. The photograph was taken at Tulagi on 1 December 1942, as work to cut away the damaged bow was underway. (NARA)

USS *Chicago*, on the left, under tow by USS *Louisville* on the morning of 30 January 1943. The damaged cruiser had been torpedoed by Japanese aircraft the previous night during the Battle of Rennell Island. (USNHHC)

8 Australian and US naval forces covering the landings on Guadalcanal clashed with a Japanese force at the Battle of Savo Island. The Allies were badly beaten with the loss of three cruisers.

23 A Japanese convoy with supplies for its garrison on Guadalcanal was intercepted by the US Navy's Task Force 61. Over the course of two days, one Japanese carrier and two transports were sunk.

SEPTEMBER 1942

12 The Japanese 35th Infantry Brigade launched a counter-attack on Guadalcanal, in what became known as the Battle of Bloody Ridge.

24 Japanese forces conducted landings throughout the Gilbert Islands.

OCTOBER 1942

14 Japanese aircraft delivered a heavy raid against Henderson Field on Guadalcanal.

23 A large Japanese ground attack against Henderson Field continued for three days. The attack was repulsed with the Japanese suffering 3,500 casualties.

25 The Battle of Santa Cruz Islands began. This was the fourth carrier battle of the Pacific War.

NOVEMBER 1942

14 American aircraft sank six transports and two cruisers during a Japanese attempt to reinforce enemy troops on Guadalcanal.

30 A renewed attempt by the Japanese to reach Guadalcanal with supplies was again intercepted in the Battle of Tassafaronga, but the US suffered a defeat.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill poses with members of the British delegation to the Casablanca Conference, in the grounds of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's villa, on 17 January 1943. Seated left to right are: Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal; Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound; Churchill; Field Marshal Sir John Dill; and General Sir Alan Brooke. Standing behind Churchill is Lord Louis Mountbatten. (USNHHC)

DECEMBER 1942

17 The Indian 14th Division began its offensive in the Arakan region of Burma.

31 The Japanese Imperial Staff ordered the abandonment of Guadalcanal.

JANUARY 1943

29 The last major naval engagement between the US Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy during the Guadalcanal Campaign, the Battle of Rennell Island, began.

FEBRUARY 1943

3 The British offensive in the Arakan ended without success.

8 General Wingate led the first Chindit operation into Burma.

9 The last Japanese troops were evacuated from Guadalcanal.

21 Australian and US aircraft and torpedo boats intercepted a Japanese convoy attempting to support its troops in New Guinea and sank eight transports and four destroyers in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. More than 3,600 Japanese soldiers were killed.

MARCH 1943

28 At the Casablanca Conference, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill set out their policies for the future direction of the war and warned the Germans and the Japanese that the Allies would accept nothing less than unconditional surrender. Though an Allied victory appears inevitable, war would continue until the bitter end.

SLAUGHTER FROM THE SKIES

Just before 08.00 hours on 7 December 1941, Japanese forces launched a surprise, pre-emptive military strike against Pearl Harbor. War had come to the Pacific.

It was a Sunday morning. Many of the men at the US Naval Station Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu in the idyllic Hawaiian Islands were finishing a leisurely breakfast when the bombs started to fall. Ensign Guy Fanningan could scarcely believe what was happening: 'Everyone thought it was a joke to have an air raid on Sunday. Then I heard an explosion.'[1]

Corporal Earl C. Nightingale USMC was on board the battleship USS *Arizona*. 'I was leaving the breakfast table when the ship's siren for air defense sounded. Having no anti-aircraft battle station, I paid little attention to it. Suddenly, I heard an explosion, I ran to the port door leading to the quarter deck and saw a bomb strike a barge of some sort alongside the *Nevada*, or in that vicinity. The Marine color guard came in at this point saying that we were being attacked.

'I could distinctly hear machine-gun fire. I believe at this point our anti-aircraft battery opened up … I reached the boat deck and our anti-aircraft guns were in full action firing very rapidly. I was about three-quarters of the way to the first platform on the mast when it seemed as though a bomb struck our quarter deck. I could hear shrapnel or fragments whistling past me.'[2]

The first wave of Japanese aircraft, amounting to 183 dive bombers, torpedo bombers and fighters, flew low over the harbour completely unchallenged. As fears of war with Japan had been mounting in recent weeks, orders had been issued to man every fourth gun on each ship. But no one really expected the Japanese would risk an attack upon such a well-defended base, and consequently none of the main anti-aircraft guns were manned and the ammunition for the machine-guns was under lock and key.[3]

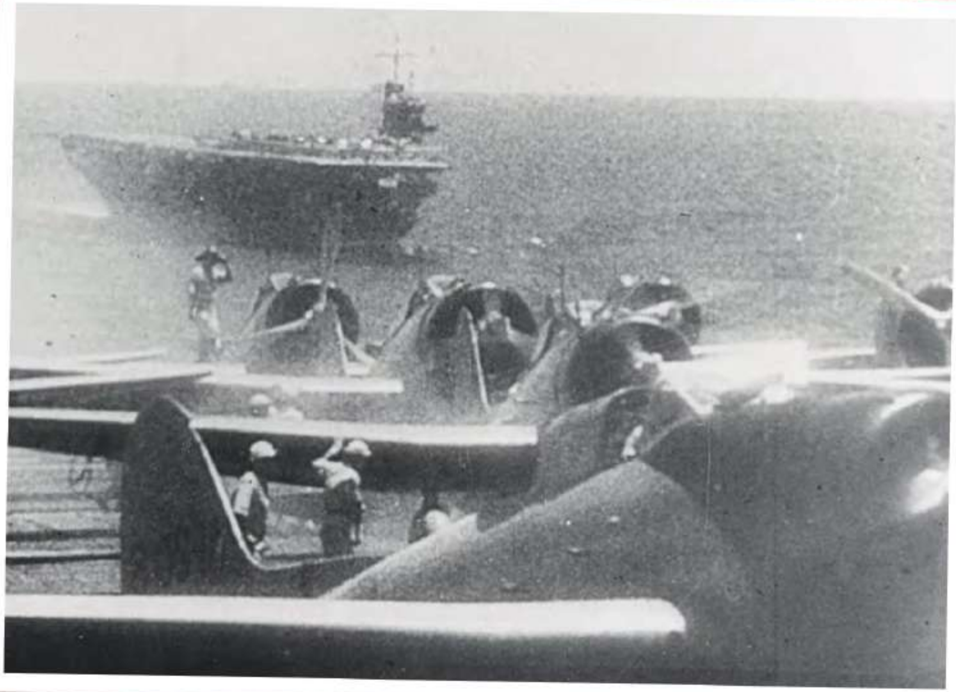
A Japanese Navy Mitsubishi A6M Zero, tail code AI-108, takes off from the aircraft carrier *Akagi* on its way to attack Pearl Harbor during the morning of 7 December 1941.

(National Museum of the US Navy)

'When I arrived in secondary aft I reported to Major Shapley', continued Marine Nightingale. 'I had only been there a short time when a terrible explosion caused the ship to shake violently. I looked at the boat deck and everything seemed aflame forward of the mainmast. I reported to the Major that the ship was aflame, which was rather needless, and, after looking about, the Major ordered us to leave.

'I was the last man to leave secondary aft because I looked around and there was no one left. I followed the Major down the port side of the tripod mast. The railings, as we ascended, were very hot and as we reached the boat deck I noted that it was torn up and burned. The bodies of the dead were thick, and badly burned men were heading for the quarterdeck, only to fall apparently dead or badly wounded. ... Charred bodies were everywhere.'

An explosion flung Nightingale into the water of the harbour and he was helped ashore by Major Shapley. Nightingale was one of the lucky ones, as 1,177 of the 1,512 men onboard *Arizona* perished in the disaster. And still the bombs rained down.



Japanese Navy Aichi D3A Type 99 carrier-based bombers, which had the Allied reporting name *Val*, prepare to take off from an aircraft carrier during the morning of 7 December 1941. The carrier in the background is *Soryu*. (USNHHC)

A Japanese Nakajima B5N carrier-based torpedo bomber, which had the Allied reporting name Kate, takes off from the aircraft carrier *Shokaku* en route to attack Pearl Harbor. (USNHHC)

'THEY ARE HERE!'

Everest Capra, of the Medical Administrative Corps, had a game of tennis before making himself breakfast as usual on a Sunday morning. As he was preparing his first meal of the day, he saw aircraft approaching unusually low in the sky. 'It was of no surprise when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec 7, 1941. Most of us had been expecting this, but did not have the actual date,' he later explained. 'Then I noticed the red ball, and I knew right that minute that it was the day. Only wearing tennis shorts and sneakers, I ran about the buildings screaming, "They are here!" and then all hell started to break loose.

'I made it back to the barracks just in time to get some better wear ... and just as I exited the barracks, they were hit. From that moment on, running about trying to escape from being hit, I and two others started picking bodies to take to the hospital which just opened the day before. I was later hit, and knocked out for a while ... I was bleeding from a hanging finger and also leg wounds. But did not turn myself in. I managed to put my index finger back together with masking tape and it healed after six weeks.'

Paul Aschbrenner was on board the USS *Oklahoma*, which was moored in Battleship Row's berth Fox 5 that fateful Sunday morning. 'They announced over the speaker to man your battle stations ... Just as they got the last word out, I can remember very distinctly that a torpedo hit just as I was

司令長官
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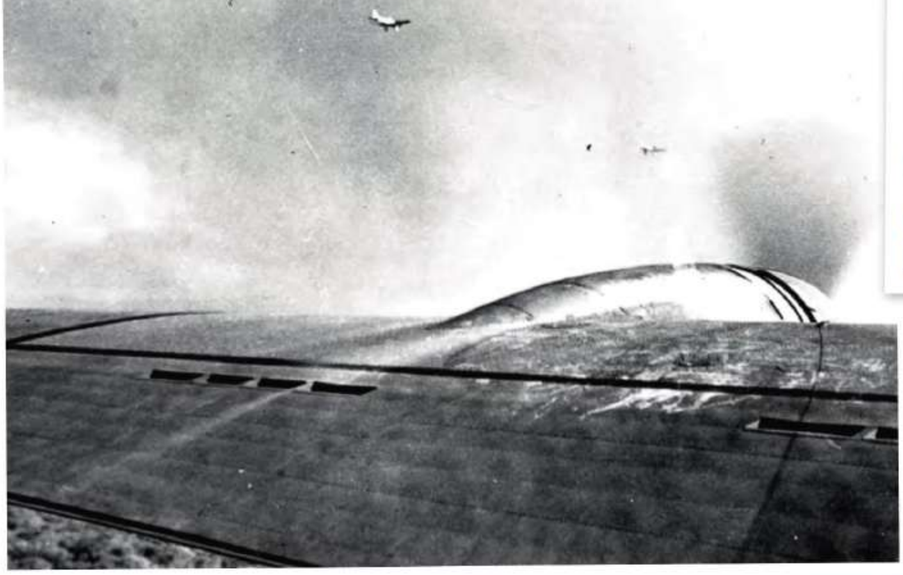
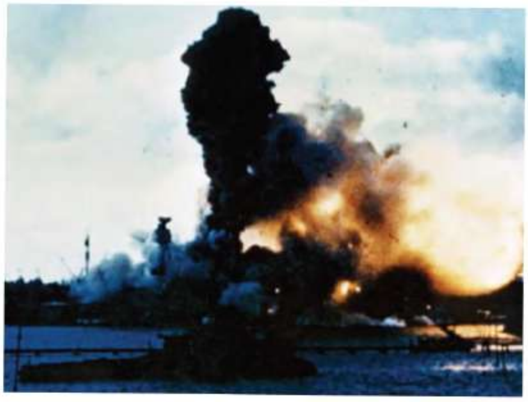
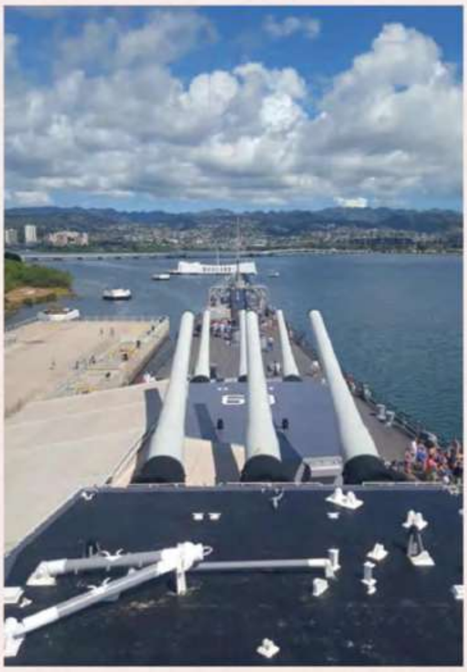
The commanding officer of the Japanese aircraft carrier *Shokaku* watches as aircraft take off to attack Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941. The Kanji inscription on the left is an exhortation to pilots to do their duty. (USNHHC)

A pair of Japanese Aichi D3A Type 99 carrier-based bombers fly near a USAAF 38th Reconnaissance Squadron Boeing B-17E, serial number #41-2408, that arrived over Oahu, from California, in the middle of the Japanese attack. The B-17 was piloted by First Lieutenant Karl T. Barthelmess. He and his crew initially thought that the Vals were US aircraft sent out from Hawaii to provide an escort. It was only when they opened fire on the B-17 before passing by, that the USAAF crew had an inkling of what they had flown into. (NARA)





A still from dramatic colour film footage, shot from the decks of the hospital ship USS *Solace*, showing USS *Arizona* ablaze immediately following the explosion of her forward magazines on 7 December 1941. The footage was captured by an Army medical doctor named Eric Haakenson. (USNHHC)



Looking down part of Battleship Row over the guns of the USS ***Missouri***. (John Grehan)

running down the steps to go to my battle station down at the powder deck aboard the battleship.'

After the first torpedoes struck *Oklahoma*, the lights went out and Aschbrenner found himself deep inside the ship in the dark. 'The ship started to list – started to turn over. As it was turning over, I got about one or two decks up. I think the next deck was the shell deck. I honestly could see in my heart that I couldn't possibly get out of there in my own strength ... And in some miraculous way, I did get out. And as I was getting out of the overhang of the turret, the crude oil and water was coming in.'[4]

'I CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT IS HAPPENING'

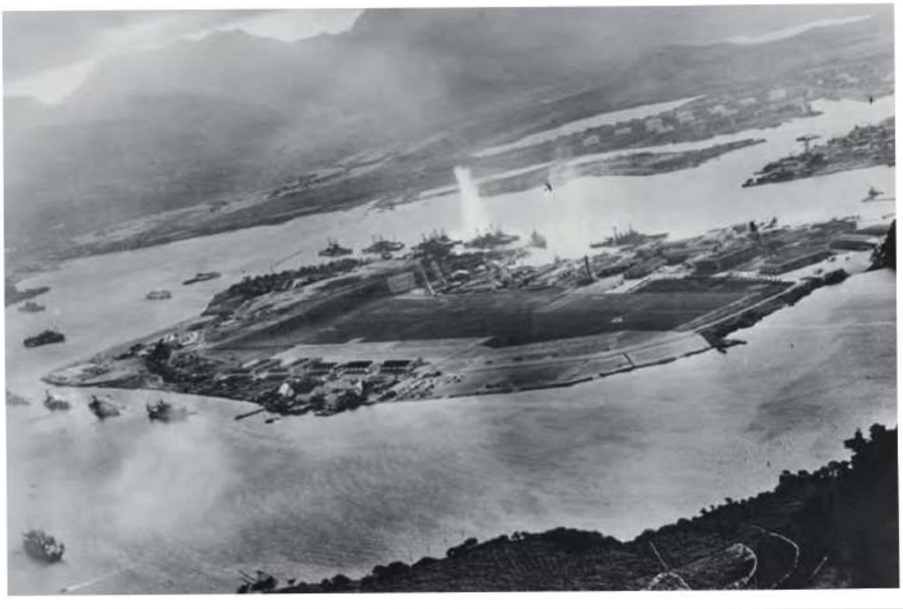
That first wave of Japanese aircraft was led by Commander Mitsuo Fuchida. 'One hour and forty minutes after leaving the carriers,' he later recalled, 'I knew that we should be nearing our goal. Small openings in the thick cloud cover afforded occasional glimpses of the ocean, as I strained my eyes for the first sight of land. Suddenly a long white line of breaking surf appeared directly beneath my plane. It was the northern shore of Oahu.

'Veering right toward the west coast of the island, we could see that the sky over Pearl Harbor was clear. Presently the harbor itself became visible across the central Oahu plain, a film of morning mist hovering over it. I peered intently through my binoculars at the ships riding peacefully at anchor. One by one I counted them. Yes, the battleships were there all right, eight of them!

'As we closed in, enemy anti-aircraft fire began to concentrate on us. Dark grey puffs burst all around. Most of them came from ships' batteries, but land batteries were also active ...

'Now it was nearly time for "Ready to release", and I concentrated my attention on the lead plane to note the instant his bomb was dropped. Suddenly a cloud came between the bombsight and the target, and just as I was thinking that we had already overshot, the lead plane banked slightly and turned right toward Honolulu. We had missed the release point because of the cloud and would have to try again.

'While my group circled for another attempt, others made their runs, some trying



The strike on Pearl Harbor underway, as seen from a Japanese plane during the torpedo attack on ships moored on both sides of Ford Island. A torpedo has just hit USS *West Virginia* on the far side of Ford Island (centre). Other battleships moored nearby are, from left to right, *Nevada*, *Arizona*, *Tennessee* (inboard of *West Virginia*), *Oklahoma* (torpedoed and listing) alongside *Maryland*, and *California*. On the near side of Ford Island, to the left, are the light cruisers *Detroit* and *Raleigh*, target and training ship *Utah* and seaplane tender *Tangier*. *Raleigh* and *Utah* have been torpedoed, and *Utah* is listing sharply to port. Japanese planes are visible over both Ford Island and the Navy Yard at right. (USNHHC)

A view of Battleship Row today, with the distinctive USS Arizona Memorial to the right. The white landing stages indicate the mooring points of other US battleships at the time of the attack. (John Grehan)

as many as three times before succeeding. We were about to begin our second bombing run when there was a colossal explosion in battleship row. A huge column of dark red smoke rose to 1000 meters. It must have been the explosion of a ship's powder magazine. The shock wave was felt even in my plane, several miles away from the harbor.'[5]

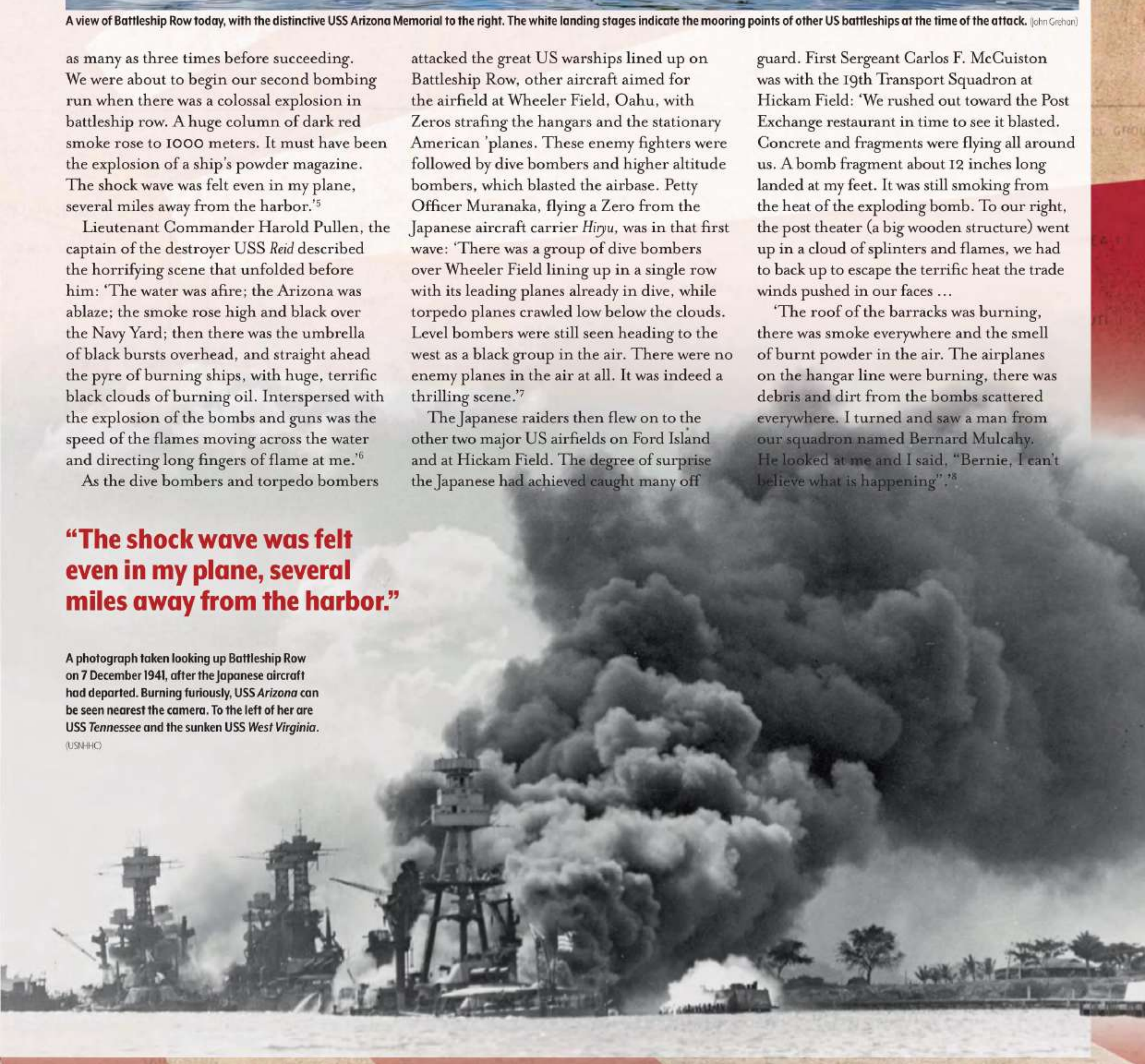
Lieutenant Commander Harold Pullen, the captain of the destroyer USS *Reid* described the horrifying scene that unfolded before him: 'The water was afire; the Arizona was ablaze; the smoke rose high and black over the Navy Yard; then there was the umbrella of black bursts overhead, and straight ahead the pyre of burning ships, with huge, terrific black clouds of burning oil. Interspersed with the explosion of the bombs and guns was the speed of the flames moving across the water and directing long fingers of flame at me.'[6]

As the dive bombers and torpedo bombers attacked the great US warships lined up on Battleship Row, other aircraft aimed for the airfield at Wheeler Field, Oahu, with Zeros strafing the hangars and the stationary American 'planes. These enemy fighters were followed by dive bombers and higher altitude bombers, which blasted the airbase. Petty Officer Muranaka, flying a Zero from the Japanese aircraft carrier *Hiryu*, was in that first wave: 'There was a group of dive bombers over Wheeler Field lining up in a single row with its leading planes already in dive, while torpedo planes crawled low below the clouds. Level bombers were still seen heading to the west as a black group in the air. There were no enemy planes in the air at all. It was indeed a thrilling scene.'[7]

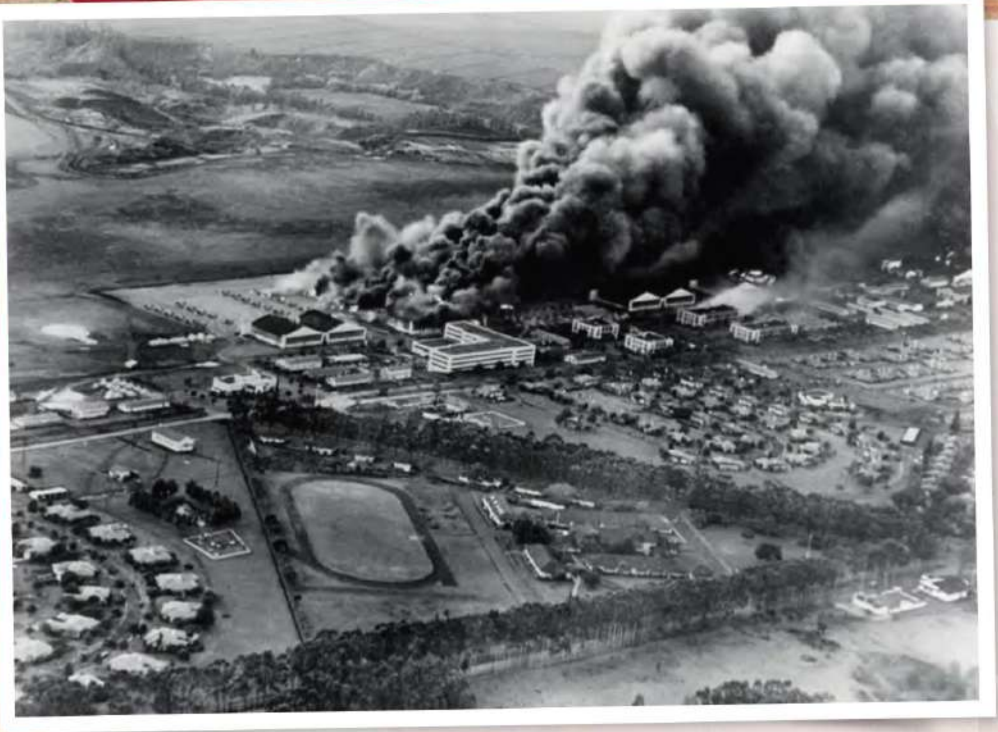
The Japanese raiders then flew on to the other two major US airfields on Ford Island and at Hickam Field. The degree of surprise the Japanese had achieved caught many off guard. First Sergeant Carlos F. McCuiston was with the 19th Transport Squadron at Hickam Field: 'We rushed out toward the Post Exchange restaurant in time to see it blasted. Concrete and fragments were flying all around us. A bomb fragment about 12 inches long landed at my feet. It was still smoking from the heat of the exploding bomb. To our right, the post theater (a big wooden structure) went up in a cloud of splinters and flames, we had to back up to escape the terrific heat the trade winds pushed in our faces ...

'The roof of the barracks was burning, there was smoke everywhere and the smell of burnt powder in the air. The airplanes on the hangar line were burning, there was debris and dirt from the bombs scattered everywhere. I turned and saw a man from our squadron named Bernard Mulcahy. He looked at me and I said, "Bernie, I can't believe what is happening".'[8]

"The shock wave was felt even in my plane, several miles away from the harbor."



A photograph taken looking up Battleship Row on 7 December 1941, after the Japanese aircraft had departed. Burning furiously, USS *Arizona* can be seen nearest the camera. To the left of her are USS *Tennessee* and the sunken USS *West Virginia*. (USNHHC)



Taken from one of the Japanese attackers, this picture shows aircraft and hangars burning at Wheeler Field soon after it was attacked on the morning of 7 December 1941. (USNHHC)

THE SECOND WAVE

Scarcely had the first wave of Japanese bombers turned to return to their carriers than a second swooped down upon Pearl Harbor. Conditions were far less benign for this group of bombers. What guns could be manned were by that time – 08.54 hours – in action and smoke billowing skywards from the fires that raged from the damaged ships and shore installations made target identification more difficult. A few of the defending P-36 Hawks and P-40 Warhawks also managed to get airborne and engaged the attackers.

This second Japanese wave was composed of 54 high-level bombers, 78 dive bombers and 56 fighters. They continued the attack upon the ships and installations as well as the USAAF base at Bellows Field. It was there that Gordon Jones had been stationed for just five days: 'When this new wave of fighters attacked, we were ordered to run and take shelter. Most of us ran to our nearest steel hangar … this bomb attack made us aware that the hangar was not a safe place to be … several of us ran north to an abandoned Officers' Club and hid under it until it too was machine gunned. I managed to crawl out … then climbed under a large thorn bush … for some reason I felt much safer at this point than I had during the entire attack.'[9]

As the last of the Japanese planes flew off into the distance, Storekeeper 3rd Class Jack Rogo gazed at the destruction the enemy had inflicted on the Pacific Fleet's base. 'The panoramic view of Pearl Harbor was breathtaking,' he mused. 'To my right, across the channel, was the USS *Shaw* all twisted in her dry dock. To my right on Ford Island lay the wreckage of our seaplane hangars with all of their windows blown out, and our seaplanes in a mass of twisted wreckage. Ahead of me the USS *Nevada*, listing, was steaming out to sea. She never made it and was beached at the mouth of the main channel. To my left was Battleship Row. I cannot remember the names or positions of the ships now, but they were all damaged, listing, sunk, and some turned bottom up. Behind me, looking across Ford Island, I could see the bottom of the USS *Utah* rising from the water and the damaged fantail of the USS *Curtiss*.'[10]

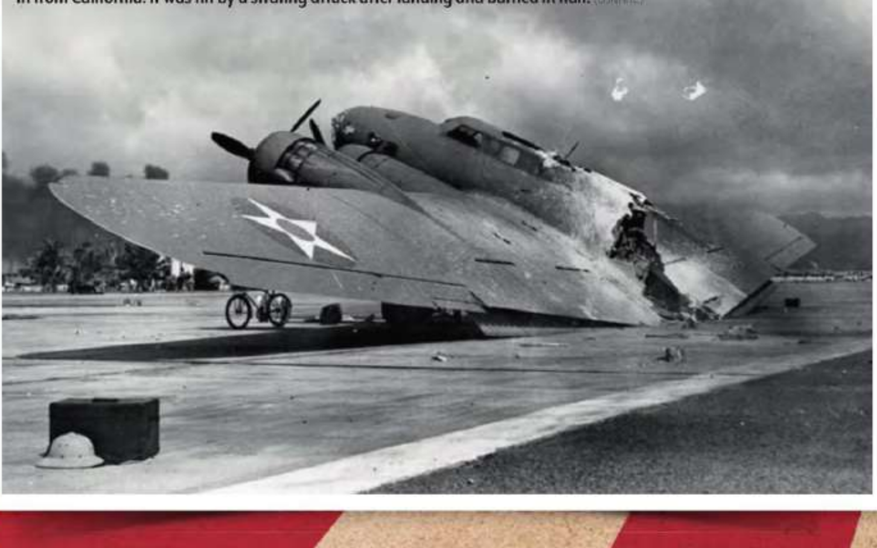
Casualties, in every imaginable condition, were everywhere. The hospital was packed with the badly wounded, many of whom would not see another dawn. 'Men, women and children were crying,' Seaman 2nd Class Victor Kamont recalled of the distressing scenes he witnessed. 'They were also bringing in the wounded that were pulled from the flaming bay. Some of these men looked beyond help, burned flesh and bone showing through the oily mess. Some of these men were half clothed, raw meat just hanging from their bones. Some cried like babies, babbling for their mother, father or loved ones. It was a sickening sight to be part of.'[11]

MIDGET SUBMARINES

It was not just from the air that the Japanese attacked on 7 December 1941. Five of their fleet submarines each carried a Type A Ko-hyoteki midget submarine. These two-man craft, each armed with two torpedoes, were launched ten nautical miles off Pearl Harbor at approximately 01.00 hours on the morning of the 7th.

One by one they were spotted and destroyed or disabled. The first one was sunk by the destroyer USS *Ward*, which engaged it at 06.37 hours with its guns – and in so doing fired the first American shots of the Pacific War. Another of the midget submarines fired its first torpedo at the seaplane tender *Curtiss* on the north side of Ford Island. This alerted the destroyer USS *Monaghan*; its captain immediately gave the order to ram the submarine. The submarine fired its second torpedo at the onrushing destroyer, but this flashed past *Monaghan*'s port side. The destroyer rammed the submarine glancingly,

A wrecked Boeing B-17C, serial #40-2074, lies near Hangar No.5 at Hickam Airfield following the end of the Japanese raid. This aircraft, piloted by Captain Raymond T. Swenson, was one of those that arrived during the raid after flying in from California. It was hit by a strafing attack after landing and burned in half. (USNHHC)



An aerial view of the USS Arizona Memorial, showing the visitors' building placed over the battleship's wreck. The memorial marks the resting place of 1,102 of the 1,177 sailors and marines killed on the battleship on 7 December 1941. The first permanent memorial to be placed on the wreck, a ten-foot tall basalt stone and plaque, was unveiled over the mid-ship deckhouse on 7 December 1955. (US Navy) then sank it with two depth charges. Because of the shallowness of the harbour, when the depth charges detonated, the explosions lifted *Monaghan's* stern out of the water. The destroyer then went out of control and smashed into a barge.

A third midget submarine grounded on the east side of Oahu. Its skipper, Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki, swam ashore and was captured, becoming the first Japanese prisoner of war in US hands. A fourth midget submarine was depth-charged before it could fire any of its torpedoes and was abandoned. The last of the midget submarines does appear to have fired its torpedoes but did not hit any target. Though the fate of this midget was unknown at the time, the wreck was found a little over fifty years later on the seabed outside Pearl Harbor.

THE LOSSES

In many respects, the statistics tell the story of the raid upon the Pacific Fleet just as graphically as the accounts of the survivors and witnesses. At the time of the attack there were 96 American ships in Pearl Harbor. Of these, 18 were sunk or seriously damaged, including all eight of the Pacific Fleet's battleships. There were 394 US aircraft on the airfields around Oahu, though many were obsolete or under repair. The aircraft actually serviceable comprised 108 fighters, 35 bombers, 11 USAAF observation aircraft, 61 US Navy patrol 'planes, 36 USN scout 'planes and 45 aircraft classified as 'miscellaneous'; making a total of 296. Total US aircraft casualites amounted to 188 destroyed, with a further 159 damaged, though this included the obsolete and unserviceable machines.

The city of Honolulu, for its part, suffered severe damage, amounting to a cost of $500,000, from some 40 explosions, all of which, with just one exception, were caused by defending anti-aircraft fire.[12]

The one statistic that still needs to be quoted is that of the human casualties of the raid. Almost 3,500 military personnel were killed or wounded as well as 73 civilians.

The damage to the Pacific Fleet, particularly with regards to battleships, was considerable. But three key targets were absent at the time of the Japanese raid. All three of the Pacific Fleet's carriers were out at sea; The USS *Enterprise* had been sent to ferry fighters and pilots to Wake Island to reinforce the garrison there, USS *Saratoga* was in San Diego to embark her air group, and the USS *Lexington* left Pearl Harbor on 5 December to ferry dive bombers to the newly-established Naval Air Station on Midway. That these three warships were absent would prove vital as the war in the Pacific, as the Japanese demonstrated so dramatically on 7 December 1941, would be dominated by carrier-borne aircraft.

Cheered by members of the ship's crew, a Nakajima B5N off from one of the Japanese carriers, either *Zuikaku* or *Shokaku*, as the second wave attack is launched. (USNHHC)

A Japanese midget submarine, in this case *HA-18*, pictured soon after its recovery near the entrance to Pearl Harbor in late July 1960. The submarine had been damaged by a depth charge attack and abandoned by its crew before it could fire its torpedoes. (USNHHC)

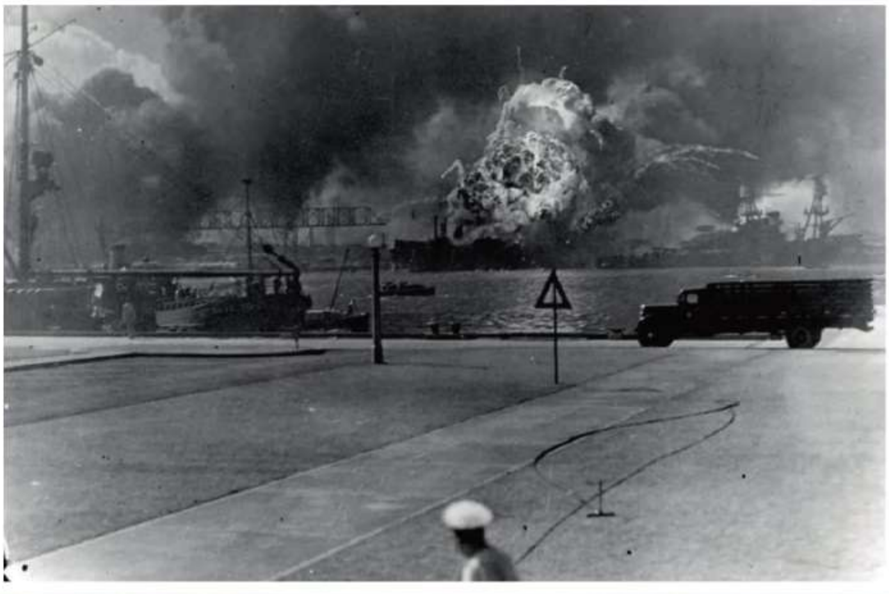
'IT IS NO JOKE'

Despite Hawaii's distance from mainland America, news of the attack on Pearl Harbor was quick to reach the US public. Indeed, one un-identified reporter for the KTU radio station in Honolulu called the NBC network in New York and provided a live commentary by telephone. His words, of which the following is an excerpt, were immediately broadcast:

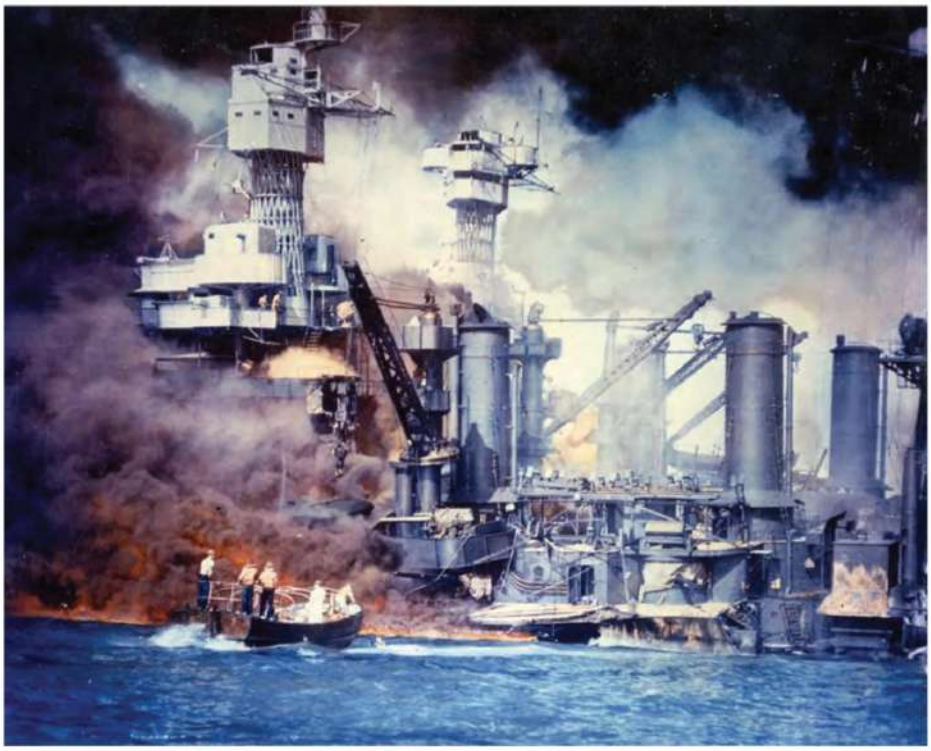
'I am speaking from the roof of the Advertiser Publishing Company Building. We have witnessed this morning the distant view a brief full battle of Pearl Harbor and the severe bombing of Pearl Harbor by enemy planes, undoubtedly Japanese. The city of Honolulu has also been attacked and considerable damage done. This battle has been going on for nearly three hours. One of the bombs dropped within fifty feet of KTU tower.

'It is no joke. It is a real war.

'The public of Honolulu has been advised to keep in their homes and away from the Army and Navy. There has been serious fighting going on in the air and in the sea. The heavy shooting seems to be . . . a little interruption. We cannot estimate just how much damage has been done, but it has been a very severe attack.'



The moment that the forward magazines of USS *Shaw*, in a floating drydock, exploded after the destroyer was hit by Japanese bombs on 7 December 1941. USS *Nevada*, also hit by the attackers, is on the right. (USNHHC)



Sailors in a motor launch rescue a survivor from the water alongside the sunken USS *West Virginia* during or shortly after the Japanese air raid. The USS *Tennessee* is inboard of the sunken battleship. (USNHHC)

'A DATE WHICH WILL LIVE IN INFAMY'

The day after the Japanese attack, as rescuers battled on at Pearl Harbor in an attempt to free men still trapped, or medical staff fought to save those fighting for their lives in hospital, the American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, rose to speak to the US Congress:

'Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

'The United States was at peace with that nation, and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American island of Oahu, the Japanese ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our secretary of state a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

'It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

'The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost ... Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.'

Lasting some seven minutes, Roosevelt's address was heard by a staggering 81 percent of America's radio-listening public. Within an hour, Congress passed a formal declaration of war against Japan. The United States of America was officially brought into the Second World War. The declaration of war against Germany followed three day later.

DERELICTION OF DUTY

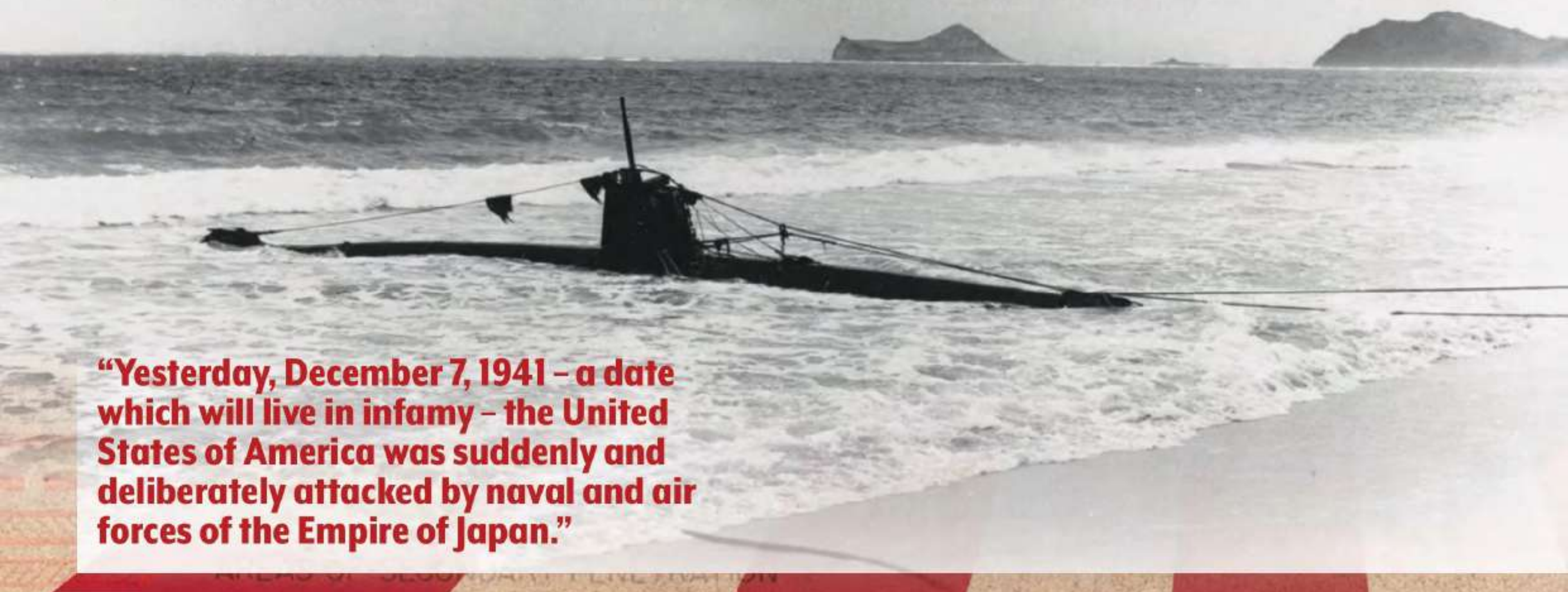
While subsequent investigations have shown that Rear Admiral Edward Kimmel, who was commander-in-chief of the United States Fleet and the US Pacific Fleet, and Major General Walter Short who was responsible for the defence of US military installations in Hawaii, were not kept fully informed of the latest political, military and intelligence developments, there can be few, if indeed any, excuses for the defenders of Pearl Harbor allowing any hostile aircraft to fly directly upon the base unchallenged.

In 1940, America had only the fourteenth (or nineteenth, depending on which source is consulted) largest army in the world at little more than a quarter of a million men. The only major military force possessed by the isolationist United States was its navy, paramount amongst which was the US Pacific Fleet. Its sole raison d'être was to defend the USA and its Pacific acquisitions from the Japanese. Indeed, there was only one country which posed any kind of threat to the US in that theatre, and that was Japan. Indeed, the Pacific Fleet had been moved 2,400 miles to the west from its base in California to Hawaii, deep in the Pacific, as a show of strength to curb Japan's expansionist ambitions. As *Fortune* magazine stated in August 1940, 'war with Japan, is the only war for which the US is prepared'.

Yet the Japanese were able to assault the Pacific Fleet's main base virtually unmolested – clearly the US was not as prepared as some thought, or at least Admiral Kimmel and his men were not. Indeed, one of Fuchida's greatest worries was that the American battleships would be protected by anti-torpedo nets which would have rendered his surprise attack almost valueless. But Kimmel had never ordered such an obvious precaution to be made.

It does seems incredible, in light of the increasingly strained relationships with

One of the Japanese midget submarines, *HA-19*, grounded on a beach in Oahu after failing in its attempt to enter Pearl Harbor and fire its torpedoes. Following its capture, this submarine toured the US as part of a drive to promote the purchase of War Bonds. (USNHHC)



"Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan."

An original hanger that stood on Ford Island on 7 December 1941. Some of the damage to the glass panes on the structure have been left unrepaired. (John Grehan)

The wreckage of a Zero that crashed at Fort Kamehameha, near Pearl Harbor, during the attack. This aircraft, which had tail code AI-154 and a red band around its rear fuselage, came from the aircraft carrier *Akagi*. (NARA)

Members of the Tennessee-class battleship USS *California*'s crew abandon ship as burning oil drifts around her at about 10.00 hours on the morning of 7 December, shortly after the end of the Japanese raid. (USNHHC)

Tokyo, that the one military force whose entire existence was to act as a bulwark against Japan, should have allowed itself to be taken by surprise. Little wonder that Kimmel and Short were found to have been derelict in their duty in the subsequent Roberts Commission inquiry into the debacle.

This was certainly the view of Henry L. Stimson, United States Secretary of War, who told *Time* magazine the following in an interview published in its edition of 1 April 1946: 'General Short had been told the two essential facts: 1) a war with Japan is threatening, 2) hostile action by Japan is possible at any moment. Given these two facts, both of which were stated without equivocation in the message of Nov. 27, the outpost commander should be on the alert to make his fight …

'To cluster his airplanes in such groups and positions that in an emergency they could not take to the air for several hours, and to keep his antiaircraft ammunition so stored that it could not be promptly and immediately available, and to use his best reconnaissance system, radar, only for a very small fraction of the day and night, in my opinion betrayed a misconception of his real duty which was almost beyond belief.'

WHO KNEW WHAT?

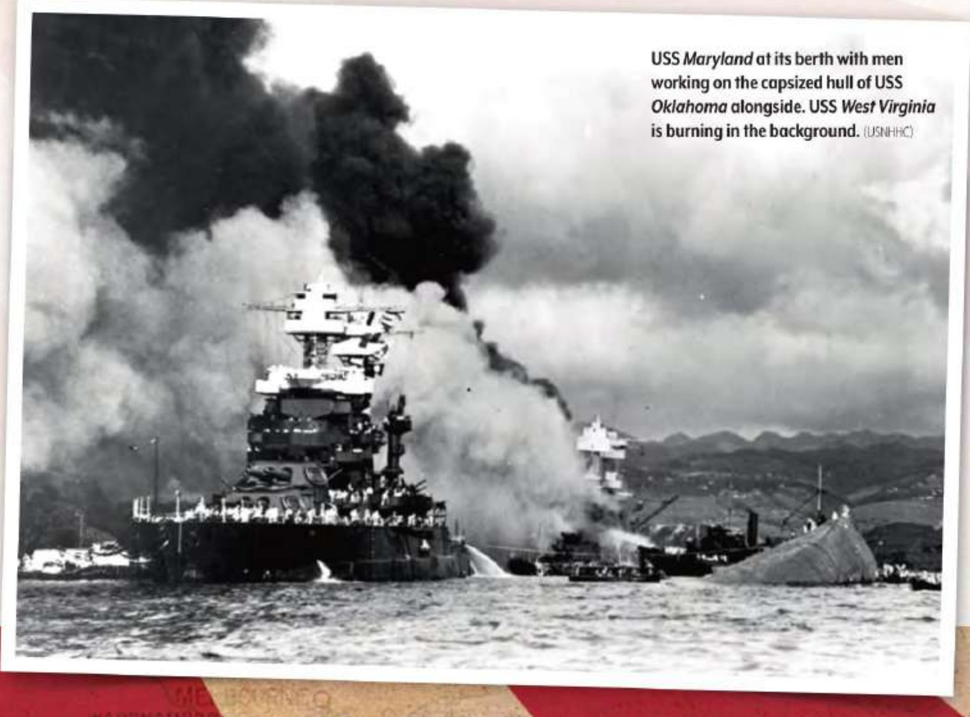
The extent to which the Americans, and for that matter the British, knew of the timing and target of the intended Japanese attack has divided opinion, with many theories being propositioned. What is certain, is that the US and the UK were expecting an attack by Japan and were preparing to take combined action.

On 25 November at a meeting with President Roosevelt and his War Council, the subject of a pre-emptive Japanese strike dominated proceedings, of which Henry Stimson wrote that the President 'brought up the event that we were likely to be attacked perhaps next Monday, for the Japs were notorious for making an attack without warning, and the question was what we should do. The question was how we should maneuver [*sic*] them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much damage to ourselves.'

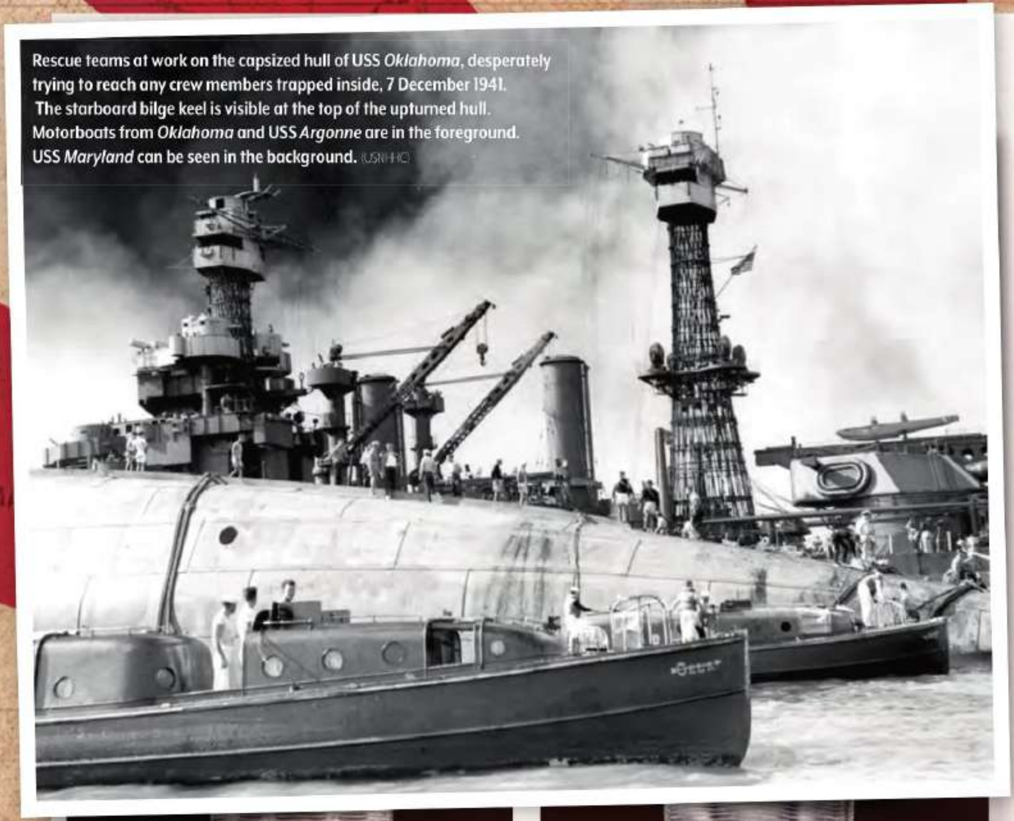
That Monday was 1 December. Not only did the US leaders expect war with Japan, but they actually wanted the enemy to strike first. It was merely a case of when and where.

That the 'when' was imminent became evident on 6 December. At 10.40 hours that day, the State Department received a report from the UK that two large convoys of Japanese transport ships escorted by cruisers and destroyers had been spotted moving westwards off Cambodia towards the Kra Isthmus. Though these convoys were clearly not heading towards any American territories, they were obviously sailing towards British-held Malaya. The Japanese were quite evidently about to go to war with the UK.

Japanese signal codes had been broken by US cryptographers and a message from Tokyo to the Japanese ambassador in Washington had been intercepted and decoded in which it stated a formal notice was to be delivered to the American Government at 13.00 hours Eastern Time on 7 December (which was dawn in the Pacific). Though the wording of this notice was somewhat imprecise, merely stating that relations between Japan, Britain and the United States were 'not in accordance with expectation', the conclusion drawn from this was that the Japanese were going to mount an offensive operation against an American



USS *Maryland* at its berth with men working on the capsized hull of USS *Oklahoma* alongside. USS *West Virginia* is burning in the background. (USNHHC)



Rescue teams at work on the capsized hull of USS *Oklahoma*, desperately trying to reach any crew members trapped inside, 7 December 1941. The starboard bilge keel is visible at the top of the upturned hull. Motorboats from *Oklahoma* and USS *Argonne* are in the foreground. USS *Maryland* can be seen in the background. (USNHHC)

PETER TOMICH
U.S. NAVY, DECEASED
PEARL HARBOR

The Medal of Honor awarded posthumously to Chief Water Tender Peter Tomich. The citation states that, 'Although realizing that the ship was capsizing, as a result of enemy bombing and torpedoing, Tomich remained at his post in the engineering plant of the USS *Utah*, until he saw that all boilers were secured and all fireroom personnel had left their stations, and by so doing lost his life.' Fifteen members of the US Navy were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions on 7 December 1941. There were also fifty-one recipients of the Navy Cross, though one of these awards, that of Lieutenant Jackson C. Pharris, was later upgraded to a Medal of Honor. (USNHHC)

installation somewhere in the Pacific at, or just after, 13.00 hours, or six hours earlier (07.00 hours) in Hawaii.

A message was promptly sent by the Army Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, to all US bases in the Pacific, including Hawaii, warning them of a possible Japanese attack. It read as follows: 'Japanese are presenting at one pm eastern standard time today what amounts to an ultimatum also they are under orders to destroy their code machine immediately. Just what significance the hour set may have we do not know but be on alert accordingly.' This message was sent out at 12.00 hours.

Due to atmospheric conditions on America's West Coast, there had been limited communication with San Francisco and none at all with Honolulu since around 10.30 hours that morning. It was decided, therefore, to try and communicate this message through a civilian commercial service and it was sent out via Western Union. The message to Pearl Harbor was despatched out at 12.17 hours, which was 06.17 hours in Hawaii. By the time it was received, the bombs were already falling. What is quite remarkable is that instead of sending a message, no one considered picking up the telephone; this was because it was not regarded as a secure means of communication and was seldom used for secret information.

Nevertheless, there is no escaping the fact that Kimmel allowed himself, and thereby his command, to be taken completely by surprise. Possibly the main reason for this was that he, and others, believed that should war break out, his fleet would be fighting far from Pearl Harbor. He fully expected to be taking offensive action, not defensive measures, and had trained his ships' crews accordingly. It was also believed that Pearl Harbor, with its hundreds of aircraft and the massed array of anti-aircraft guns mounted ashore and on the ships of the fleet, was too strong for the Japanese to dare attack. Indeed, so unconcerned were Kimmel and Stark they were planning a game of golf that Sunday morning.

Yet, even as the Japanese aircraft were taking to the sky, their hand was all but revealed. At 06.30 hours, the skipper of the supply ship *Antares*, which was approaching Oahu, spotted the conning tower of a submarine. As we have seen earlier, it was the destroyer USS *Ward* that received the report. The destroyer rushed to the scene and the midget submarine surfaced. The crew of *Ward* were ready on their guns and the second shot struck the enemy submarine which appeared to sink slowly.

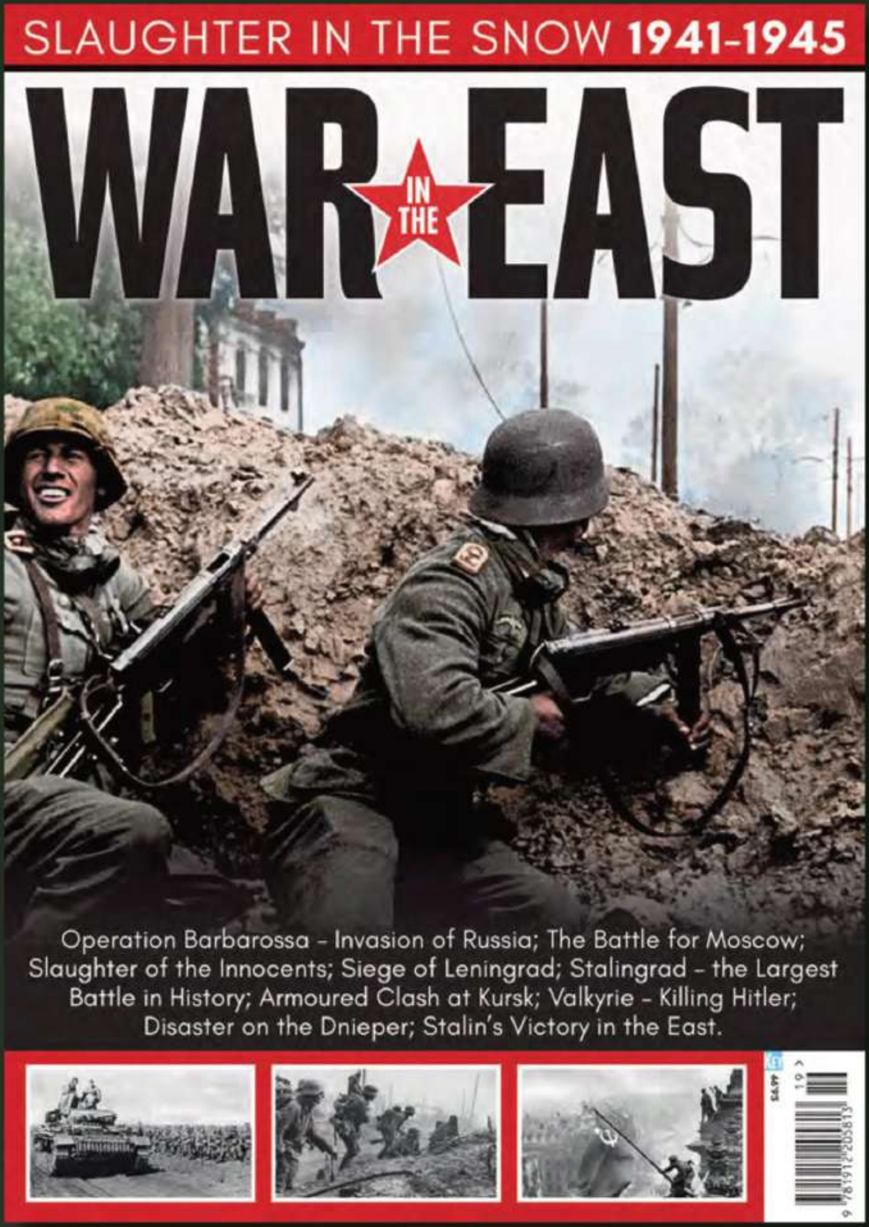
Captain William Outerbridge, *Ward*'s commander who had only taken up his post two days earlier, quickly informed the watch officer, the signal being logged at the Bishop Point Radio Station at 06.53 hours, more than an hour before Fuchida's attack. Though Kimmel was advised about the report from Outerbridge, he took no immediate action, merely asking that verification of the incident should be sought. He was still waiting for this when the bombs began to fall.

That Kimmel knew he had failed in his duty is perhaps revealed in an oft-repeated anecdote. At his headquarters, a despairing Kimmel, well aware that he was bound to be held responsible for the disaster, tore off his four-star insignia. When a spent bullet smashed through a window and struck him lightly on the chest, leaving a smudge on his spotless white uniform, Kimmel turned to his aide and said: 'Too bad it didn't kill me.'[13]

NOTES

1. Francis Pike, *Hirohito's War, The Pacific War, 1941-1945* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015), p.173.
2. Quoted on www.ussarizona.org.
3. Bernard Edwards, *Japan's Blitzkrieg, The Allied Collapse in the East 1941-42* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2006), p.12.
4. Excerpt from 'Iowa's WWII Stories', Iowa Public Television, 2006.
5. 'Attack at Pearl Harbor, 1941 – the Japanese View', www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2001).
6. Quoted in Gordon W. Prange et al, *December 7, 1941, The Day the Japanese Attacked Pearl Harbor* (Harrap, London, 1988), p.269.
7. ibid, p.198.
8. Quoted on: www.aviation.hawaii.gov.
9. Carl Smith, 'Pearl Harbor', in *The Pacific War, From Pearl Harbor to Okinawa* (Osprey, Oxford, 2015), p.31.
10. Gordon W. Prang, op cit, p.230
11. ibid, p.250.
12. Walter Lord, *Day of Infamy* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1957), p.218.
13. Francis Pike, op cit, p.175.

SLAUGHTER IN THE SNOW **1941-1945**



SLAUGHTER IN THE SNOW **1941-1945**

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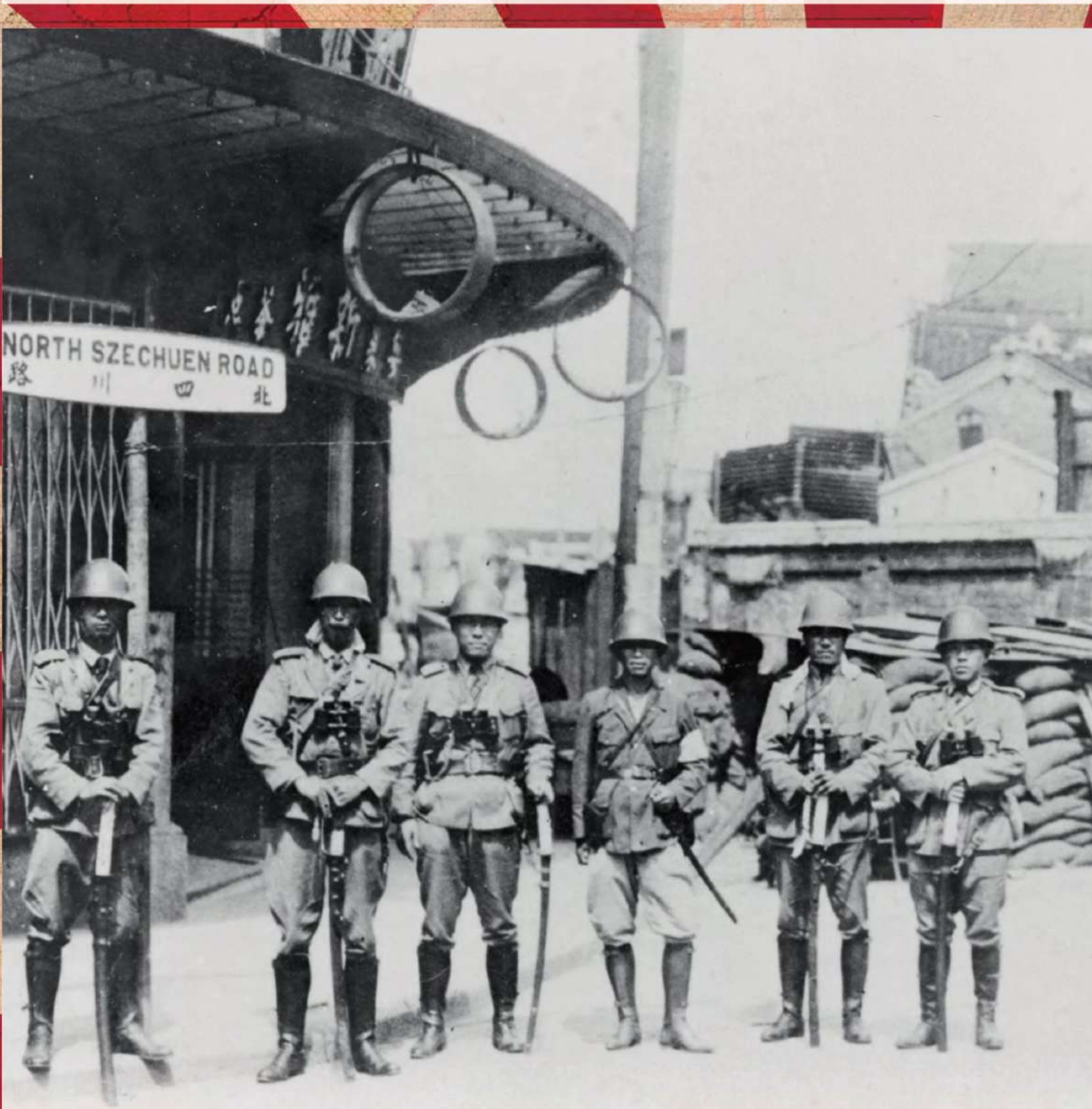


ASIA FOR THE ASIATICS

The pre-emptive strike on 7 December 1941 was merely the first stage in a hugely ambitious attempt by the Japanese to secure control of a large area of East Asia and drive the Western nations out of the region.

Japanese troops on the streets of Shanghai, circa 1937. The Japanese first attacked the port city in 1932, and during the fighting some 18,000 civilians were either killed, injured, or declared missing. A ceasefire was brokered, which held until 1937, when all areas of the city, except the International Settlement, were captured by the Japanese. The latter was eventually occupied on 8 December 1941. (USNHHC)

A Japanese Type-94 light tank in Shanghai during the occupation of the remaining Chinese-held sections of the city in 1937. (USNHHC)

There were many questions asked after the attack upon Pearl Harbor, and the debate continues. The world was certainly stunned by the events of 7 December 1941, but as Everest Capra correctly recalled, the possibility of war with Japan had become increasingly likely in the weeks and days before the Japanese attack.

The origins of the conflict between Japan and the United States of America date back to the previous century as Japan looked to transform itself from a semi-feudal introverted society to a modern outward-looking industrial state. Its population expanded exponentially, placing enormous strains upon its agricultural output. Japan needed more land to feed its people and raw materials for its industry, which resulted in its occupation of Korea in 1910.

By the beginning of the 1930s, Japan had developed into one of the most powerful countries in the Pacific. But it lacked oil, rubber and other natural resources of its own. For this reason, Japanese political leaders looked with envy at the Dutch, French and British colonies across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Japanese business leaders also saw huge markets for their products in nearby countries, particularly China.

Japan's desire to use East Asia to gain natural resources and sell manufactured products was in direct conflict with American plans for Asia. This was especially true concerning China. Washington created an 'Open Door' policy toward China. It wanted to keep China's natural resources and markets free from control by Japan or any other nation. So, when Japanese forces invaded Manchuria in 1931, the US was placed in a difficult situation.

Due to its isolationist ideals (and the fact that Japan was a major importer of American goods, especially metal, copper and oil) the US did not intervene in Manchuria, which was ceded to Japan in 1932. Manchuria was rich in minerals and its occupation enabled the Japanese to create the war machine with which it attacked the US and Britain in 1941.

Japanese leaders were not content with holding Manchuria, and in 1937 their forces invaded China itself. Remarkably, the United

Chinese troops, fleeing from the Japanese, squeeze under and through the barbed wire entanglement which separates the area of Nantao in Shanghai from the neutral ground of the French concession of the International Settlement during the fighting in 1937. (USNHHC)

States continued to trade with Japan until 1939, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt told Tokyo that America would no longer sell any items to Japan that might be used in their war with China. On the other hand, the US Government extended credits to the Chinese Government for the purchase of war supplies.

In a bid to present a legitimate appearance to its desire to completely dominate East, Southeast and Southern Asia, as well as Oceania, in June 1940 the Japanese Foreign Minister, Hachirō Arita, announced his country's intention to create a self-sufficient 'bloc of Asian nations led by the Japanese and free of Western powers'. This bloc of countries would be known as Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and its emotive slogan was 'Asia for the Asiatics'.

The Western Powers would, of course, not give up their territories or their strong trading positions in the Pacific region to Japan. The war that broken out in Europe, however, gave Japan the chance it sought. The German occupation of France and the Netherlands in May and June of 1940 meant that those two countries could offer no effective support to their colonies in the region. Equally, Britain was heavily involved in defending itself and its territories in North Africa and could spare little of its limited military resources in protecting its Asian territories. Never had there been a better time for Japan to strike.

Extremists in the Japanese government saw the German success as their chance to launch their own attack on European colonies in Asia. They quickly began negotiations with Hitler to form an alliance, signing the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy on 27 September 1940.

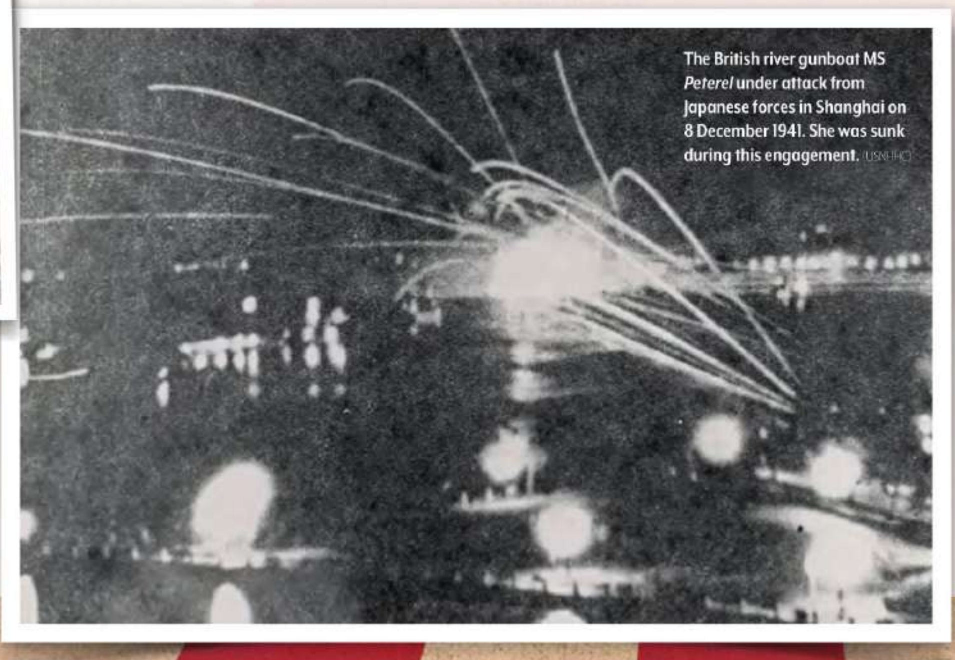
The next month, Japanese forces occupied French Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) after securing an agreement with the Vichy government. The United States responded to this growing threat by temporarily halting negotiations with Japanese diplomats, instituting a full embargo on exports to Japan, freezing Japanese assets in American banks, and sending supplies into China along the Burma Road. Over the next two days Britain and the Dutch Government in exile followed suit. The Japanese were stung by the action of the Western powers, which they saw as an attempt 'to deny Japan her rightful place in the world by destroying her only available means of self-existence and self-defence'.[1]

Faced with serious shortages as a result of the embargo, the Japanese had to act quickly. Either they had to withdraw and lose much of what they had gained, or secure the resources, particularly oil, they needed by neutralising the USA and sweeping into Southeast Asia. The longer they waited, the weaker they would become and, with limited oil reserves, would soon be unable to mount any kind of operation.

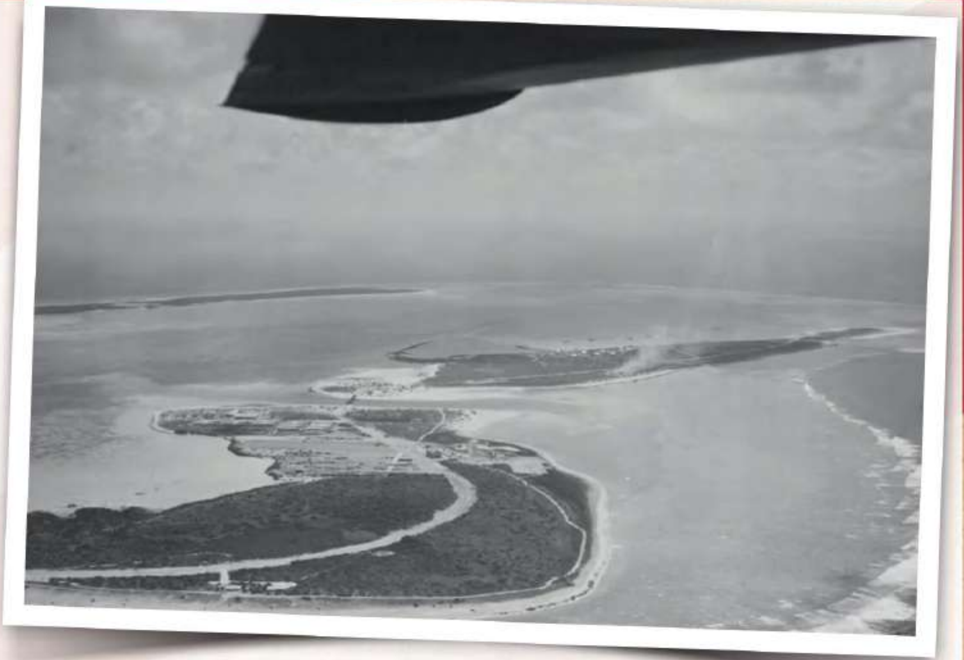
Prime Minister Hideki Tojo persuaded Emperor Hirohito and key members of the government that if the ongoing negotiations with the US failed to see the lifting of the

A refugee cart, piled high with personal belongings and furniture, is pulled by a man fleeing the fighting between Chinese and Japanese forces. View taken in the International Settlement, Shanghai, in August of 1937. (USNHHC)

Another, albeit small, Japanese victory on the same day as the attack on Pearl Harbor, was the capture of the American gunboat USS *Wake*. Stationed in Shanghai, the vessel was tied up alongside a pier when it was surrounded by a sizeable Japanese force. Though *Wake*'s crew attempted to scuttle their vessel, its captain was ultimately forced to surrender, being the only US Navy ship to do so in the Second World War. Here, personnel of the Japanese special naval landing force celebrate the capture of USS *Wake* on the first day of the War in the Pacific. (USNHHC)



The British river gunboat MS *Peterel* under attack from Japanese forces in Shanghai on 8 December 1941. She was sunk during this engagement. (USNHHC) embargo, that Japan must strike at America – and strike such a blow that by the time the enemy could recover, Japan would have conquered the territory that would yield the resources the country needed. For all this to be possible, the strike against America, and at the same time British possessions in the region, must be so powerful and effective, that it would take many months before the Western powers could retaliate, by which time Japan's position would have become so strong that Britain and the USA would baulk at trying to challenge her. A negotiated peace could then be agreed, and Japan would become one of the most powerful nations on the planet. Everything, but everything, depended on destroying the only military force which could wreck these plans – the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.



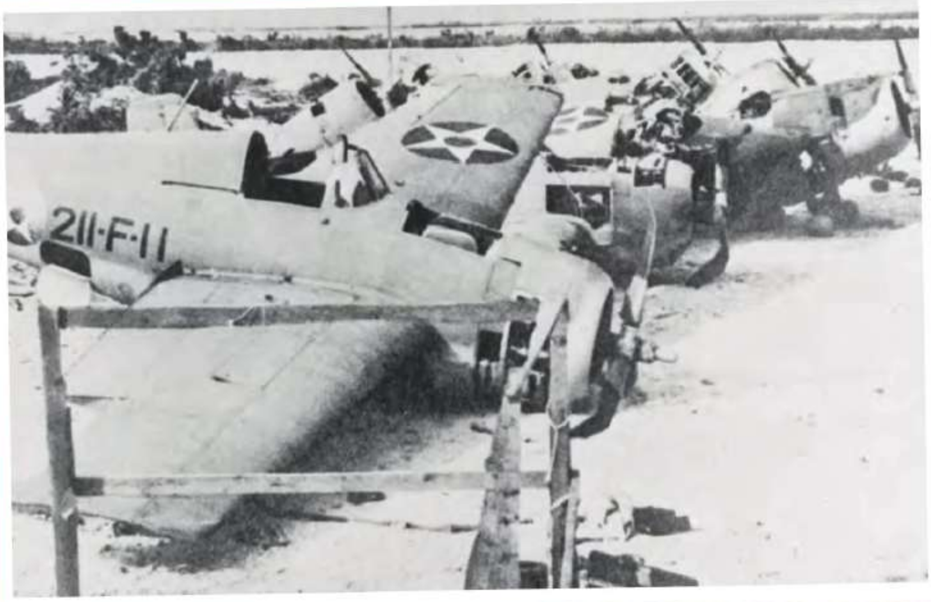
An aerial photograph taken on 25 May 1941, looking west along the northern side of Wake, with Peale Island in the centre and right middle distance, and Wilkes Island in the left distance. In this view it is possible to see the bridge connecting Wake and Peale islands, the Pan American Airways facility on Peale, and several flying boats moored in the lagoon off Peale. (US Navy)

Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka, in a view taken circa 1941. He commanded invasion forces at Wake Island in 1941, and at Lae and Salamaua, New Guinea, in 1942. (US Naval Institute)

JAPANESE PLANS

Japan's military leaders had been preparing for an attack on Pearl Harbor for many months. As early as April 1941, the 1st Air Fleet had been created and shortly after its formation, its first Chief of Staff was handed a document bearing the title *Pearl Harbor Attack Plan*. Until this plan had been conceived, Japanese policy called for an initial invasion of the Philippines with simultaneous landings on Guam Island to secure a defensive link with the home islands and the Japanese islands of the South Pacific Mandate. This move, it was expected, would result in the US fleet sailing deep into the Pacific where it would be pounced on by the Japanese navy and destroyed. By comparison, an attack on Pearl Harbor, if successful, would considerably shorten the war which was a major factor in its appeal to the Japanese leaders, who were well aware that the United States had the industrial capacity and the manpower to create a military force strong enough to defeat Japan. But Prime Minister Tojo and the military high command calculated that it would take the US six months to effectively mobilise its armies.

Pan American Airways' compound on Peale Island, Wake, as seen on 5 March 1940. A hotel can be seen upper left. In about seven minutes of aerial attack on 8 December 1941, Japanese bombs and bullets totally wrecked these facilities, the hotel being set alight. (USNHHC)



Wrecked Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat fighters of Marine Fighting Squadron 211 (VMF-211) lie abandoned by Wake's airstrip sometime after the Japanese captured the island in December 1941. The plane in the foreground, 211-F-11, was flown by Captain Henry T. Elrod during the 11 December attacks that sank the Japanese destroyer *Kisaragi*. Damaged beyond repair at that time, 211-F-11 was subsequently used as a source of parts to keep other planes operational. (NARA)

By this time, it was believed, Japan would have seized its objectives and created an extended and heavily defended perimeter to protect both the home islands and Japan's newly acquired overseas resources before the United States had a chance to recover and before Britain could release any sizable forces from its battle with Hitler. The Japanese could then present such a formidable and costly defensive line to the Allies that they would accept Japan's gains and sue for peace.

Vice Admiral Ryunosuke Kusaka was instructed by Admiral Yamamoto to turn the plan into reality. The two key elements to success were surprise and the deployment of overwhelming strength. 'However great the Pacific was,' Kusaka explained, 'nobody could assure that the task force would not meet on its way and attack any ships of any nationality. Its danger would increase greatly as the force neared Hawaii. Since US aerial patrol by flying boats extending 600 miles from their bases was expected even in peace time, it had to be regarded as the most difficult task of all difficulties to launch a surprise attack without being noticed beforehand.'

Kusaka studied the passages of all ships across the Pacific during the previous ten years and found that in that time no ships had passed through the line near 40 degrees North. Following the route Kusaka had identified would enable the Japanese striking force to reach a point 800 miles north of the Hawaiian Islands, just outside the range of the patrolling American aircraft. The task force was then to make a high-speed dash at night to within 200 miles of Pearl Harbor. As the Japanese ships would have to cross 3,000 miles of ocean and then back again, it was also necessary for the ships to be refuelled at sea.

If such a pre-emptive strike was to be carried out, it was essential that most of the Pacific Fleet was destroyed, and consequently accurate and up to date information on the location of the American capital ships was vital. The ships were known to undertake training and other tasks during the week, but that they all returned to Pearl Harbor to rest on Sundays. The attack would, therefore, take place on a Sunday.

In September 1941, a 'map manoeuvre' exercise was held in the Naval Staff College in Tokyo to study the operational plan of Japan's Combined Fleet attacking the Pacific Fleet and Royal Navy warships in the Indian Ocean. The exercise validated Yamamoto's plan, following which a precise scale model of Oahu Island was created. All the attacking pilots studied the model and decided on their own particular approach and method of attack.

The man who led the first wave, Commander Fuchida, was also the one who was responsible for the tactical execution of the attack. If surprise was achieved, he intended to inflict a fatal blow to the outside row of US battleships and carriers with torpedoes, immediately followed by high-level bombing upon the inside row of battleships. He would then destroy heavy cruisers and other ships with dive bombing, while simultaneously destroying key installations and anti-aircraft batteries to pave the way for the second wave.

US Marines embarking on USS *Tangier* at Pearl Harbor, on 15 December 1941, prior to sailing for Wake as part of an abortive attempt to relieve the island. (USNHHC)

If the Combined Fleet was spotted on its approach, and surprise could not be achieved, Fuchida planned to send dive bombers and fighters first into the scene to destroy the defensive American fighters so as to open the way for the torpedo and high-level bombers which would form the second wave.

GUAM SURRENDERS

As we know surprise was achieved and, to a large degree, Yamamoto's great operation succeeded, but disabling the Pacific Fleet was only the first part of the larger, general plan. Next on the list of key Japanese objectives to be gained in the opening rounds of the war were the mid-Pacific US territories of Guam and Wake Island, the stepping-stones to the Philippines. The first of these to be attacked was Guam, the only American possession in the otherwise Japanese-controlled Mariana Islands. Conscious of the likelihood of war breaking out with Japan, the Americans had, fortunately, evacuated all the families, dependents and other non-essential personnel from the island some weeks earlier.

A portrait of Captain Henry T. Elrod USMC taken at Quantico, Virginia, in January 1938. Having been mortally wounded while protecting his men who were carrying ammunition to a gun emplacement during the fighting on 23 December, Elrod was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. (USNHHC)

Less than four hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Guam was subjected to a two-day aerial bombardment by Japanese aircraft based at nearby Saipan. Then, on 9 and 10 December, Rear Admiral Gotō, flying his flag on the heavy cruiser

The remains of fuel storage tanks on Wake photographed by the Japanese following the island's capture. (USNHHC)

Japanese troops pay hommage at a memorial erected to their commander, Lieutenant Kinichi Uchida, who was killed in the landing on Wake Island, 23 December 1941. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Two prisoners of war, Fred H. Gones and Milton A. Glazier, both of whom were captured by the Japanese on Wake Island on 23 December 1941, pictured on their way home in 1945. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Aoba, landed 5,000 men, including one troop of mounted cavalry. All that stood in their way were around 300 marines and a similar number of local militia. The fighting lasted for just twenty-five minutes before the island's governor, Captain George J. McMillin, ordered the Stars and Stripes to be hauled down.

THE BATTLE FOR WAKE ISLAND

It was at around 07.00 hours on the morning of Monday, 8 December 1941, that word reached the tiny US garrison on the island of Wake that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. One of the most isolated islands in the world, Wake, along with the smaller and adjacent Peale and Wilkes islands, which between them surround a central lagoon, was nearly 600 miles from the nearest land – and even that was uninhabited.

As news of the Japanese act of war spread through the military and civilian personnel on the atoll, they were unaware just how soon the fighting was going to hit their part of the Pacific. Though Wake's garrison was little larger than that of Guam, based on the island's recently-completed airfield were the Grumman F4F-3 Wildcats of Marine Fighting Squadron 211 (VMF-211).

At 07.10 hours, thirty-four enemy Mitsubishi G3M2 Type 96 land-based attack bombers lifted off from the airfield at Roi in the Marshalls. They arrived over Wake just before noon, the sound of their engines masked until the last minute by the noise of the breaking surf. The bombs were soon raining down, despite the best efforts of the island's defenders, including some of the aircraft of VMF-211.

The Japanese bombers returned the following day, attacking from about 13,000 feet at 11.45 hours. Though one of Wake's fighters claimed a victory over one of the raiders, the Japanese had wreaked considerable havoc on the island, demolishing or badly damaging a number of buildings, including the hospital, a warehouse and a metal workshop.

Under Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka, a Japanese invasion force had set out from Kwajalein, in the Marshall Islands, on 8 December. Despite an encounter with an American submarine, USS *Triton*, which fired a salvo of four torpedoes at 00.17 hours on 11 December, the first torpedoes fired from a Pacific Fleet submarine in the Second World War, Kajioka's warships opened fire on Wake at 05.22 hours that same day.

The wreckage of a US Marine Corps F4F-3 on Wake after the surrender. This is probably the aircraft flown by VMF-221's Captain Herbert C. Freuler, pictured on the beach where he crash-landed on 22 December after he had destroyed a Nakajima B5N bomber. (USNHHC)

PACIFIC OCEAN
PEALE I.
WILKES I.
PACIFIC OCEAN

First Lieutenant John F. Kinney USMC (left), and First Lieutenant John A. McAllister USMC, of the First Marine Battalion, relating their experiences following capture on Wake Island when it fell to the Japanese on December 23, 1941. They are shown back in the United States after being the first Wake prisoners to have escaped from Shanghai prison. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Corporal James R. Martin USMC holds the sword he found amid the ruins of a Japanese officer's quarters on Saipan later in the war in July 1944. The engraving on the sword identified it as belonging to Captain Walter Nevins Flournoy USMC, who was taken prisoner by the Japanese on Guam in December 1941. In the background is a Japanese battle flag, another trophy from Saipan, July 1944. Flournoy survived captivity and went on to be awarded the Legion of Merit for his actions during the Korean War. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Commander Winfield S. Cunningham's men were ready and waiting, their batteries of 5-inch ex-naval guns hit and severely damaged Kajioka's flagship, the light cruiser *Yubari*, and sank the destroyer *Hayate*. Three other ships were hit in quick succession. The four Wildcats also damaged another cruiser and sank the destroyer *Kisaragi*, as well as driving off another aerial attack. Kajioka was forced into an embarrassing withdrawal to the island of Kwajalein, the main Japanese territory in the Marshall Islands.

Over the days that followed, the Japanese offensive against Wake was maintained. Among the attacks in this period, on 12 December a lone Kawanishi H6K Type 97 flying boat dropped a number of bombs, and on the 16th a formation of 33 Type 96s raided Wake Island at 13.40 hours.

The withdrawal of Kajioka's invasion force gave the Americans a few days' grace, of which Admiral Kimmel took full advantage of by ordering all three of the Pacific Fleet's aircraft carriers to sail to Wake's relief. It was to be Kimmel's last important decision before he was removed from his command. However, the relief force, of Rear Admiral Frank Fletcher's Task Force 14, was ordered to turn back on 23 December for fear of encountering Yamamoto's Combined Force when little more than 425 miles from Wake, leaving the island at the mercy of the enemy.

That enemy, after underestimating the determination of the defenders of Wake, returned the very same day Fletcher's force turned back to Hawaii – it was during the morning of 21 December that Kajioka set out from the Marshalls for his second attempt at Wake. This time he and his men were better prepared and equipped, and had been reinforced, particularly with the addition of two aircraft carriers fresh from the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Following a preliminary bombardment, the Japanese landings at numerous points along Wake Island's coastline began at 02.35 hours on 23 December. After a full night and morning of intense fighting, during which many civilians and airmen volunteered to fight as infantry and the American defenders undertook aggressive counter-attacks, Wake's garrison was finally forced to surrender. 'The men of Wake had fought well,' notes the historian Robert J. Cressman, 'impressing the victors with their tenacious bravery, which later proved to be inspiring, not only to the Marine Corps, but also to the nation as a whole'.

THE OFFENSIVE CONTINUED

Everything depended on the swift seizure of the countries that would provide the Japanese with the resources to continue the war indefinitely, and then to fortify and protect those territories. This included the capture of the Gilbert Islands, a chain of 16 atolls and coral islands in the southwest Pacific about halfway between Papua New Guinea and Hawaii.

On 10 December, 300 Japanese troops plus labourers of the so-called Gilberts Invasion Special Landing Force arrived off the northernmost island of Makin and occupied it without resistance. Lying east of the Japanese-held Marshall Islands, the intention was to build a seaplane base on Makin which would enable the Japanese to extend their air patrols closer to Howland Island, Baker Island and Ellice Islands – all held by the Allies – and protect the eastern flank of the eventual Japanese perimeter from an Allied attack.

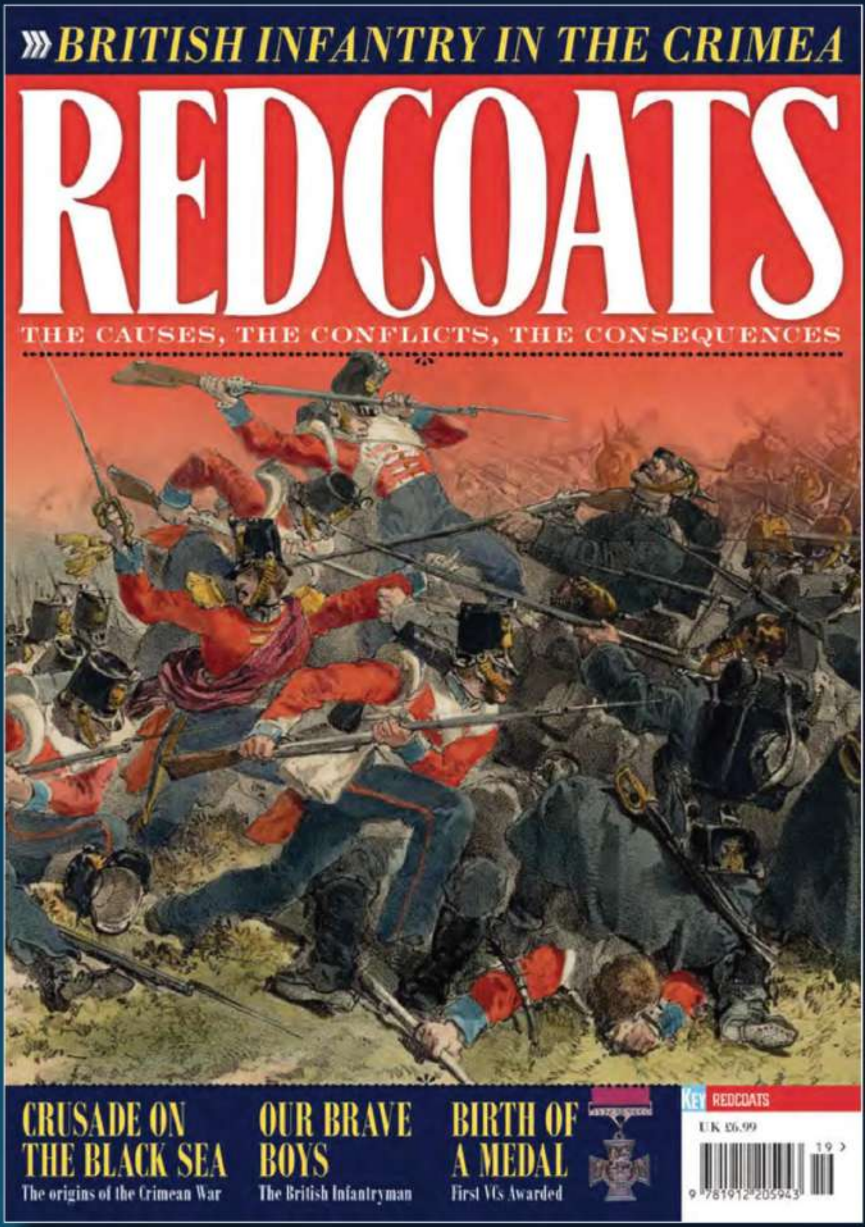
The capture of Guam, Wake and the Gilberts had been relatively small affairs, but sitting in the Western Pacific were the 7,000 islands of the Philippines. There could be found the strongest American military, air force and naval bases beyond Hawaii.

Personnel of the American Embassy in Tokyo pictured outside the building's main entrance in April 1942. The staff seen here had been interned since 7 December 1941. They have gathered together prior to their repatriation to the United States in exchange for the Japanese diplomatic mission in America. (USNHHC)

NOTE

1. Susan Wells, *December 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor, America's Darkest Day* (Tehabi Books, San Diego, 2001), p.68.

THE CAUSES, THE CONFLICTS, THE CONSEQUENCES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DISASTER AT SEA

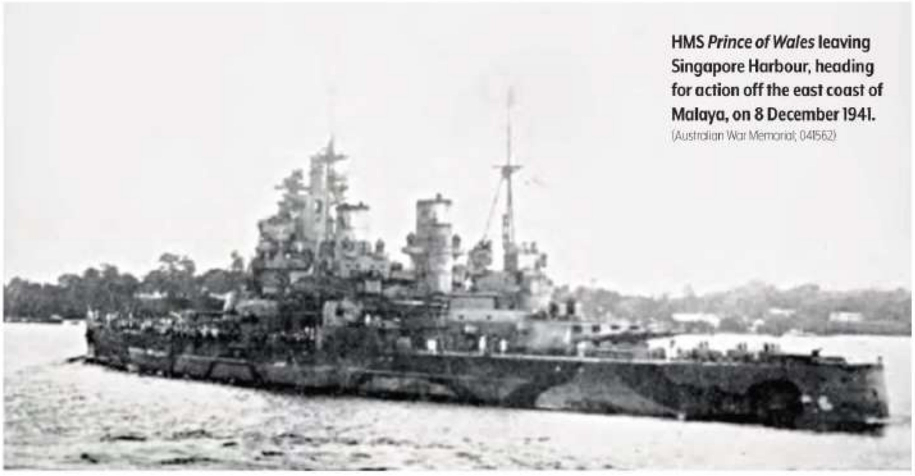
Commissioned in January 1941, HMS *Prince of Wales*, the Royal Navy's latest battleship, was the pride of the fleet – but she became the first capital ship ever to be sunk by naval air power on the open sea.

The opening shots in the Pacific War were not, in fact, fired at Pearl Harbor. At around first light on 7 December 1941, as a Japanese invasion force passed through the Gulf of Siam en route to Malaya, a number of Aichi E13A Jake reconnaissance floatplanes were catapulted into the air, almost certainly from the seaplane tender *Kamikawa Maru*. One of those aircraft, that flown by Ensign Eiichi Ogata, soon encountered an RAF Catalina flying boat, serial number W8417 and coded FV-W, which was shadowing the enemy ships.

Ogata manoeuvred his aircraft into a position from which he opened fire on the Catalina, flown by the 205 Squadron crew of Flying Officer Patrick Edwin Bedell. Bedell managed to evade Ogata, who, in turn, continued to monitor the Catalina. Some 20 minutes later, a patrol of Japanese Army Ki-27s arrived on the scene and promptly attacked the flying boat. After several passes by the fighters, the Catalina exploded and fell into the sea. All eight men on board were killed. They were the first Allied casualties of the War in the Pacific.

JAPAN INVASIONS BEGIN

It was just after midnight local time (the International Date Line passes through the centre of the Pacific Ocean) on 8 December 1941, a little more than 30 minutes before the bombs began to fall on Hawaii, that Japanese troops landed at Kota Bharu on the northeast coast of British-controlled Malaya.[1] Another of Britain's colonies, Hong Kong, was next to be attacked. As Japanese aircraft struck, destroying the few RAF planes stationed at the airfield there, troops from Lieutenant General Takashi Sakai's 23rd Army crossed from China into the colony. These assaults were rapidly followed by landings at Patani, Singora and Bangkok in Siam, today's Thailand, by the Japanese 15th and 25th armies. The task handed to the former was to occupy and control Siam, while the 25th was to advance through Malaysia to seize Singapore.


HMS *Prince of Wales* leaving Singapore Harbour, heading for action off the east coast of Malaya, on 8 December 1941.
(Australian War Memorial; 041562)

On 10 December disaster struck the Royal Navy. Acutely aware of the possibility of a pre-emptive attack by the Japanese, the new 35,000-ton King George V-class battleship, and pride of the British fleet, HMS *Prince of Wales*, accompanied by the 32,000-ton battle-cruiser *Repulse*, had been sent to Singapore to bolster the British presence in the region. The two warships were supposed to be accompanied by the aircraft carrier HMS *Indomitable*, which would provide them with aerial cover, but the carrier ran aground before she could join Vice Admiral Sir Tom Phillips' Force Z which also included four destroyers, HMS *Electra*, HMS *Express*, HMS *Tenedos* and the Australian ship HMAS *Vampire*.

Following the Japanese strike of 7/8 December, Phillips was ordered to put to sea to try and prevent further Japanese landings on the Malayan coast. Force Z sailed from

Singapore at 17.35 hours on 8 December. Phillips hoped to surprise the Japanese and disrupt the enemy landings.

It was understood that the enemy battlecruiser *Kongo*, together with cruisers and destroyers, were supporting the transports, and that the Japanese landing was probably supported by submarines and mining. Phillips would have a tough battle on his hands against such a large enemy force and in a signal which he received at 22.53 hours on 8 December, he was warned that no fighter protection would be available. Nevertheless, Phillips was keen to intervene in the Japanese invasion and he steamed on.

With frequent rainstorms and low cloud, the weather conditions during most of Tuesday, 9 December, were favourable for Force Z to avoid being spotted by the Japanese. There was an unconfirmed report of the sighting of an enemy aircraft at 06.20 hours that day by *Vampire*, the machine being seen for one minute by one lookout only. This was disregarded. However, between 17.00 hours and 18.30 hours, the weather cleared and three Japanese naval reconnaissance aircraft were sighted in quick succession from *Prince of Wales*.

At around that time, Phillips decided to send the old destroyer *Tenedos*, which was running low on fuel, back to Singapore. Its captain was instructed to make radio contact with base at 08.00 hours the next morning, to inform Singapore of the planned course of Force Z, while the main fleet maintained radio silence. Phillips had also resolved to detach the remaining destroyers at 22.00 hours that night and make a high-speed descent on Singora with *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* only. He considered the destroyers would be vulnerable to air attack and their low fuel levels, if involved in a protract battle, might become a great problem. The Admiral intended to rely on the speed and surprise of the heavy ships' attack to avoid any significant damage to them. Being much larger and stronger than the destroyers, the two heavy ships would be able to sustain light damage without it affecting their speed or manoeuvrability. According to the official Admiralty account, Phillips also believed that Japanese aircraft encountered 'would not be carrying anti-ship bombs or torpedoes and that the Force on retirement would only have to deal with hastily organized long-range bombers from bases in Indo-China'.

However, on knowing that the Force had been detected by the enemy, Phillips considered that the risk of attacking Singora was no longer justified. The ships he hoped to engage would have been withdrawn and *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* would be certain to face a very large-scale air attack. Phillips could not endanger the pride of the fleet in such circumstances. He had no choice but to abandon his mission and return to Singapore.

A view of HMS *Repulse* departing Singapore at the same time as HMS *Prince of Wales*.
(Australian War Memorial; 041565)

HMS *Prince of Wales* photographed earlier in 1941, sometime prior to her engagement with the German battleship *Bismarck* on 24 May that year. She is lowering a Supermarine Walrus over the side.
(USNHHC)

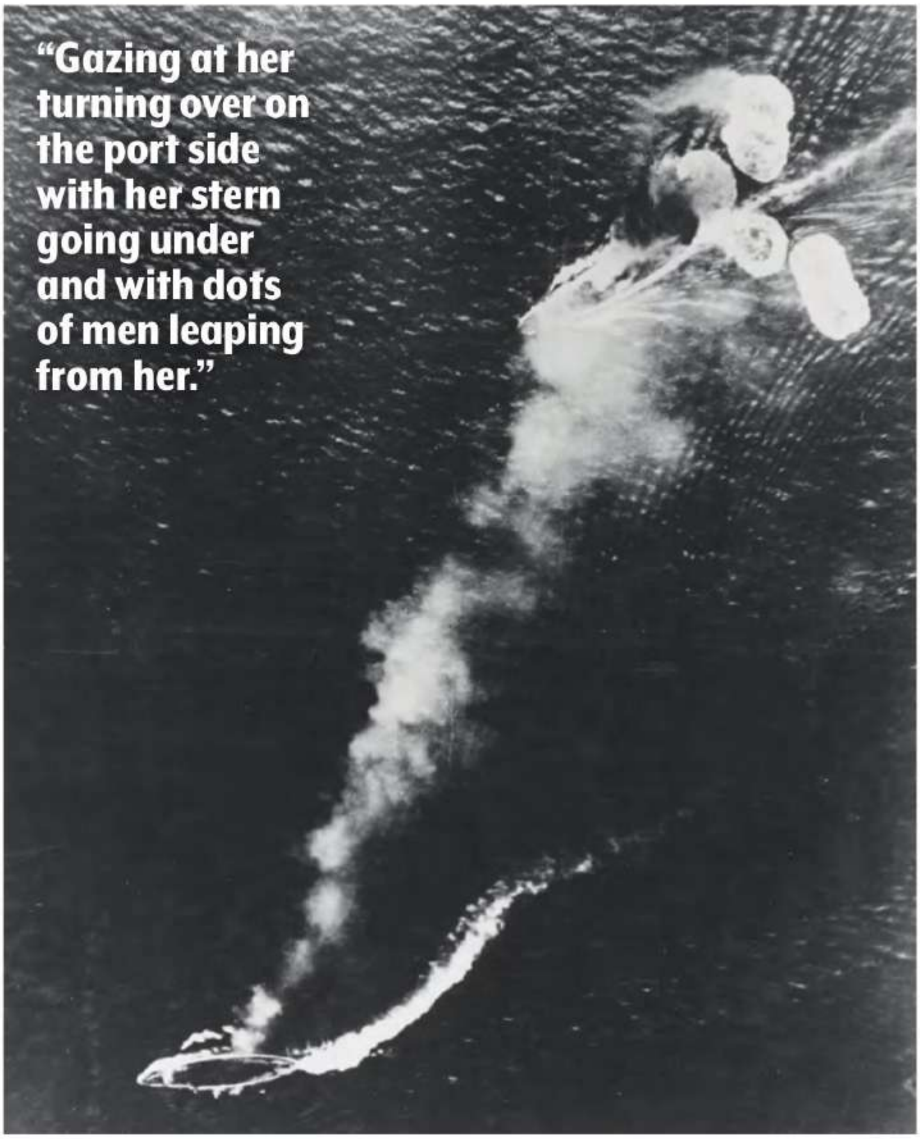
'NOTHING SEEMED TO STOP THEM'

Phillips waited until dusk when he was able to shake off the Japanese aerial reconnaissance patrols. Force Z then turned southwards, hoping to make considerable headway towards Singapore under the cover of darkness. But Japanese submarines had tracked the British ships, passing that information to the 22nd Air Flotilla based at Saigon in Indochina. Consequently, on the morning of 10 December Japanese Mitsubishi G3M Type 96 torpedo-bombers launched a devastating assault against Force Z which was caught with no aerial protection.

Much controversy surrounds the situation *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were in that morning. At 00.50 hours that same morning, 10 December, Phillips had received a report from Rear Admiral Sir Arthur Palliser, his Chief of Staff in Singapore, of reports of Japanese landings at Kuantan, on the east coast of Malaya, halfway between Singapore and Kota Bharu. Here was a chance for Phillips to accomplish something from his abortive mission and two minutes after receiving the signal he turned towards Kuantan, increasing his speed to 25 knots. Phillips did not signal his intention to move to Kuantan as that would have revealed his position to the enemy, but Palliser failed to anticipate this and did not request air cover for the British ships over Kuantan.

One hour before reaching Kuantan, Force Z passed at extreme range what appeared to be one small ship with a number of barges or junks. On finding Kuantan all quiet with no sign of the enemy, Phillips decided to go back and investigate these barges before returning to Singapore. It was while steaming eastwards to do this that Force Z was attacked by enemy aircraft.

"Gazing at her turning over on the port side with her stern going under and with dots of men leaping from her."



Taken from a Japanese aircraft during the initial high-level bombing attack, this dramatic image shows the attacks on HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*. The latter, which can be seen near the bottom of the view, has just been hit by one bomb and near-missed by several more. *Prince of Wales*, meanwhile, is near the top of the image, generating a considerable amount of smoke. (USNHHC)

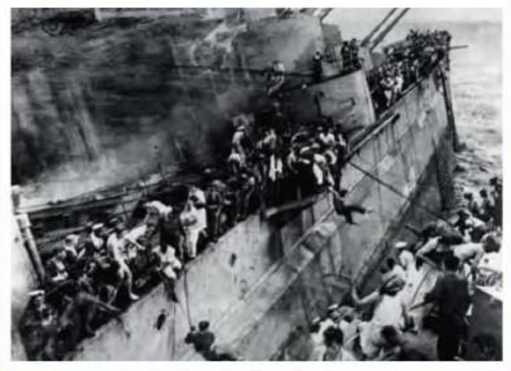
A view of the attack on HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*, again taken from a Japanese aircraft. HMS *Prince of Wales* is at far left, with HMS *Repulse* beyond her. A destroyer, either *Express* or *Electra*, is manoeuvring in the foreground. At least one source states that this photograph was taken after the first torpedo attack, during which *Prince of Wales* sustained heavy torpedo damage. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Prince of Wales had one of the most advanced naval anti-aircraft systems of the time – the High Angle Control System – and there is little doubt that there was a feeling among the crew that the battleship would be able to adequately defend itself from aerial attack, as the sentiments of Ordinary Seaman Derek Wilson reveal: 'I could see a formation of about ten planes skimming low on the water towards us. I … waited with excitement the massacre of this echelon monster that would frighten the life out of lesser mortals. But, no, not us; let them get nearer, catch them on the upsweep. A deafening crescendo of noise erupted into the heavens. Eight 5.25s fired simultaneously. I watched the shells burst – but not a plane was hit. To me they seemed well *off* target. The planes came on remorselessly as all the pom-poms, machine guns and the Bofors guns opened up. All hell seemed to be let loose at once, but nothing seemed to stop them.'[2]

This first attack saw eight G3M bombers concentrating solely upon *Repulse*. Though all released their bombs, only one hit the battlecruiser. 'Explosions erupted either side of the ship, covering her in heavy spray,' recalled Ted Matthews in the aft high-angle director on *Repulse*. 'Suddenly, there was a tremendous detonation. We'd been hit on the port hangar; almost immediately our position was covered in steam, as a pipe had been fractured in the explosion. I remember being shocked at the accuracy of the attack. It was far more precise than anything we'd previously encountered at the hands of the German Airforce.'[3] As it transpired, the bomb caused no serious damage to the battle-cruiser and almost half an hour passed before the second attack developed – but this time the 17 aircraft were Type 96 torpedo-bombers.

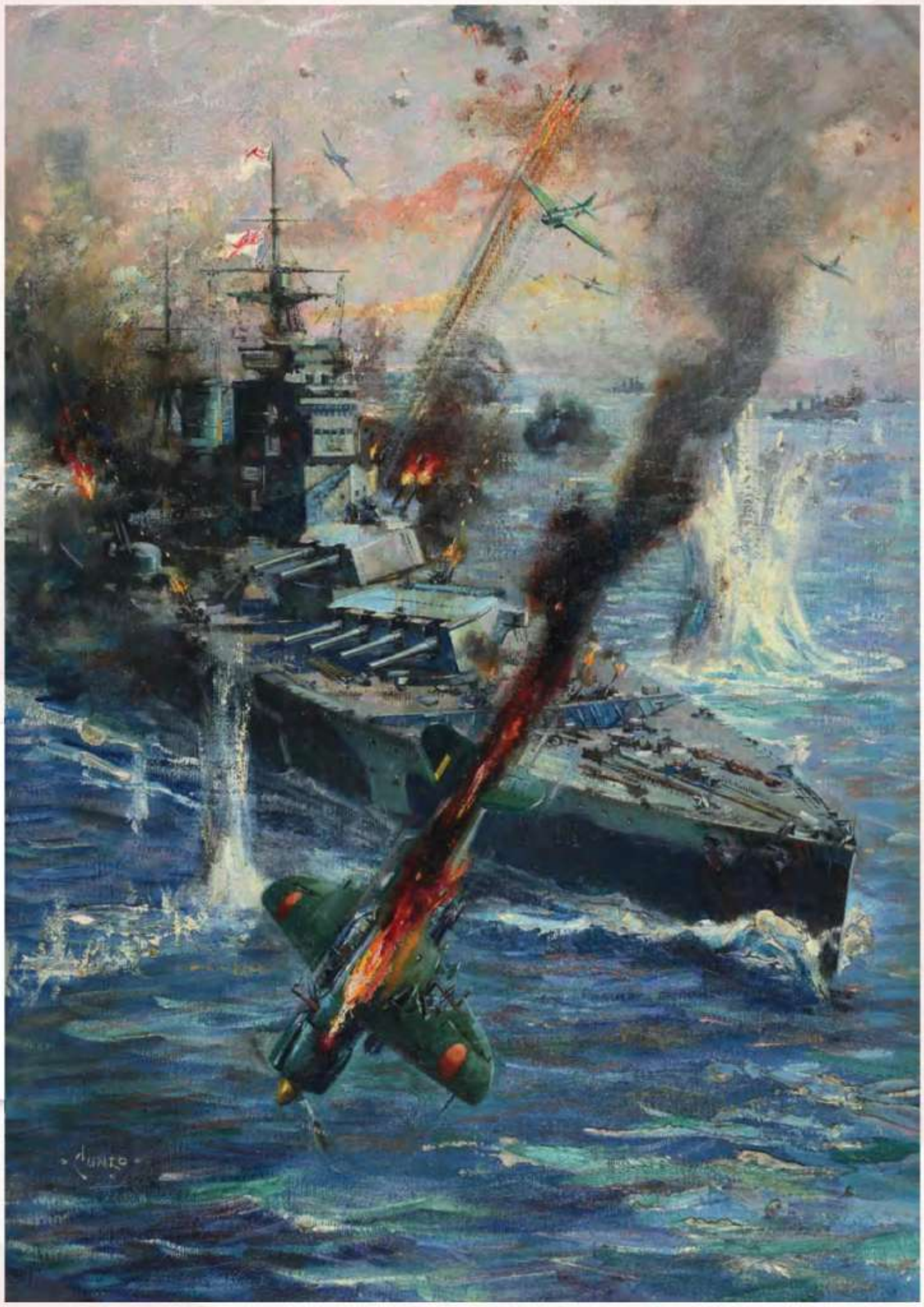
THE FINAL ATTACK

Eight of the Japanese aircraft aimed for *Prince of Wales*. Seven of the torpedoes they unleashed sped harmlessly wide of the battleship, but the eighth struck *Prince of Wales* at the point where the shaft of its port propeller exited the ship, allowing water to pour in. But because the warship was travelling at high speed, her propeller was spinning at maximum revs, drawing even more water in.



As the disaster unfolds, some of the crew of the sinking HMS *Prince of Wales* abandon ship, transferring, where they can, to the destroyer HMS *Express*. Moments later, the list on *Prince of Wales* suddenly increased and *Express* had to withdraw. (Australian War Memorial; P02018.055)

HMS *Prince of Wales* pictured listing heavily after the attack on 10 December 1941. Members of the crew can be seen scrambling over the side into lifeboats. (HMP)



By Terence Cuneo, this painting, produced for the Ministry of Information during the war, depicts the two Royal Navy warships under attack on 10 December 1941. (The National Archives; INF3-45)

Prince of Wales immediately began to list and, as water rushed through other areas of the ship, power was lost to her pumps and some of her guns. The ship was virtually unmanoeuvrable and unable to defend herself adequately. When 26 Mitsubishi G4M torpedo bombers then launched their torpedoes against the battleship she was struck three times and shuddered to a halt.

War Correspondent Edward O'Dowd Gallagher, a South African reporter for the *Daily Mail*, was on board *Repulse* and recorded *Prince of Wales*' final moments: 'Her outline is hardly distinguishable in smoke and flame from all her guns except the fourteen-inchers. I can see one plane release a torpedo. It drops nose heavy into the sea and churns up a small wake as it drives straight at the *Prince of Wales*. It explodes against her bows.

'A couple of seconds later another explodes amidships and another astern. Gazing at her turning over on the port side with her stern going under and with dots of men leaping from her.'

At the same time as this last torpedo attack developed against *Prince of Wales*, more planes attacked *Repulse*. This assault was recounted by the senior surviving officer, Captain William Tennant: 'In the fourth attack about eight aircraft were seen low on the horizon on the starboard bow. Being low down it signified another torpedo bombing attack was impending. When about three miles away they split into two formations and I estimated that those on the right hand would launch their torpedoes first and I started to swing the ship to starboard.

Japanese troops march into Hong Kong, December 1941. (Historic Military Press)

CAUTION
NARROW BRIDGE

The fall of Hong Kong in December 1941 – Japanese troops parade through the British colony. (USNHHC)

Taken from a news reel, this picture shows Japanese troops awaiting an inspection having participated in a victory parade down Hong Kong's Queen Street. (Critical Past)

'The torpedoes were dropped at a distance of 2,500 yards and it seemed obvious that we should be once more successful in combing their tracks. The left-hand formation appeared to be making straight for *Prince of Wales* … When these aircraft were a little before the port beam at a distance of approximately 2,000 yards they turned straight at me and fired their torpedoes. It now became obvious that, if these torpedoes were aimed straight, *Repulse* would be most certainly hit as any other alteration of course would have caused me to be hit by the tracks of those torpedoes.'

Tennant had evaded a total of 19 torpedoes before *Repulse* was hit by first one, and then a further three. The end was soon to come for *Repulse*, and Ted Matthews was to experience every painful moment: 'I had a clear view of the final attacks, watching in horror as a group of bombers attacked from our starboard side. The skipper immediately altered course. Suddenly, three planes approached from the direction of *Prince of Wales* launching their torpedoes. It was obvious we couldn't miss them. The planes flew straight by *Repulse*, although two of them misjudged their angle of flight, skimming directly overhead, thus presenting themselves as a perfect target for our AA guns and were promptly blown out of the sky.

'Unfortunately, the damage had been done. I waited in anticipation of the worst, as the torpedoes disappeared under our port side. It seemed to take an eternity for anything to happen. At one point, I thought they'd somehow missed or failed to detonate. But it wasn't to be. Suddenly there was a massive explosion. I immediately knew we'd lost *Repulse*, for within seconds she took on a frightening list to port, so rapid no amount of counter flooding would save her. I didn't hear the "Abandon Ship", but there again I wasn't going to hang around as I could see her quickly disappearing beneath me.'

When Tennant realised that Phillips had not requested fighter protection, he immediately broke radio silence and called for help. When the message was received at Singapore at 12.04 hours that Force Z was under attack, the fighter squadron which was standing by at RAF Kallang was immediately despatched. Six Brewster Buffaloes took off at 12.15 hours, only to arrive on the scene of action just as *Prince of Wales* was sinking and when all enemy aircraft had left.

WEAK AND NAKED

When the two great ships sank, 840 men went to their deaths. Phillips chose to go down with his ships knowing, possibly, as Kimmel had done, that he would be held accountable for the loss of the pride of the British fleet.

The next morning after the loss of the two great warships, Winston Churchill received the news by telephone from the First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound. 'Prime Minister,' the latter declared, 'I have to report to you that the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* have both been sunk by the Japanese – we think by aircraft. Tom Phillips is drowned.' 'Are you sure it's true?' responded Churchill, to which Pound confirmed 'There is no doubt at all'.

'In all the war,' noted Churchill solemnly, 'I never received a more direct shock … As I turned over and twisted in bed the full horror of the news sank in upon me. There were no British or American ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the American survivors of Pearl Harbor, who were hastening back to California. Over all this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked.'

NOTES

1. The opening shots were actually fired a short time earlier when an RAF Catalina was shot down by Japanese fighters.
2. Martin Middlebrook and Patrick Mahoney, *Battleship, The Loss of the Prince of Wales and Repulse* (Allen Lane, London, 1977), p.185.
3. Alan Matthews, *The Sinking of the Prince of Wales and Repulse*, a series of personal accounts compiled from crew members, www.microworks.net/pacific/personal/pow_repulse.htm

Survivors from HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse* pictured bobbing in the water as a destroyer moves in for the rescue. Some 2,320 men from both warships were saved. (Australian War Memorial; P02018.058)

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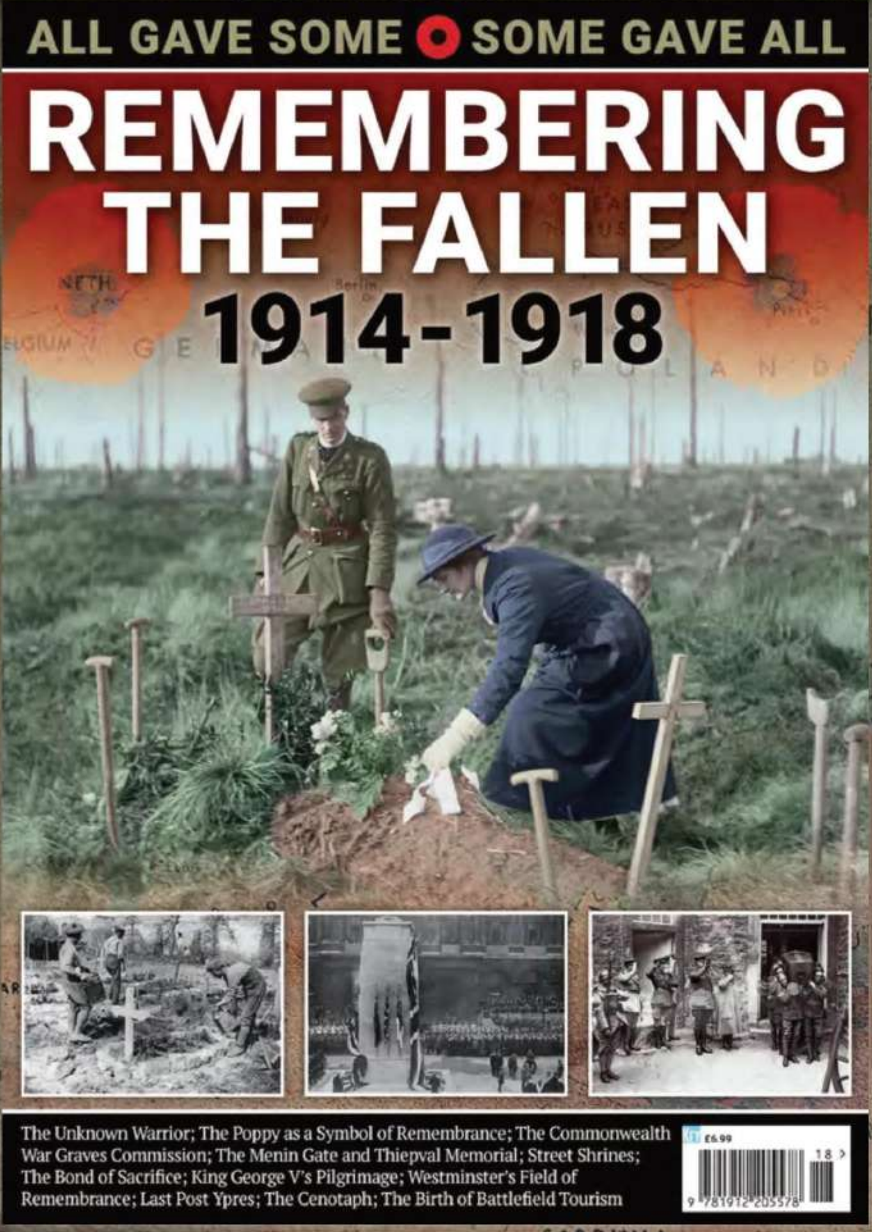

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FAILURE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Though news had reached Manila of the raid on Pearl Harbor, American and Filipino forces were still taken by surprise when the Japanese attacked the Philippines.

The seizure of the Philippines, a US possession since 1898, had long been an ambition of the Japanese, a fact that America was well aware of. Consequently, the islands had been placed under the military command of General Douglas MacArthur, who was designated commander of the United States Armed Forces in the Asia-Pacific region. Under him was Major General Lewis R. Brereton, who was in charge of the Far East Air Force. There could be no doubt in either generals' mind that the Philippines would be one of Japan's primary targets.

Japanese aircraft had been spotted entering Philippine air space a number of times in early December 1941, and on the 5th MacArthur ordered all Air Corps stations to be put on alert and for all aircraft to be dispersed and placed under guard. He had earlier also informed Army Chief of Staff, General Marshall, that his intention was to place Brereton's heavy bombers south of the main island of Luzon. There they would be at a safe distance from Japanese bombers based on Formosa but still close enough to 'deliver their own blows' at the enemy. A suitable site for the US bombers had been found on the island of Mindanao, 500 miles from the main air force base of Clark Field near Manila, the Philippine capital.

On 1 December, Brereton was duly told to transfer his 35 B-17s to Mindanao. By 5 December, only 16 of the B-17s had been flown south. There are a number of reasons why MacArthur's instructions were not acted on promptly, one of which was that a party was being held in the Manila Hotel in honour of Brereton on the night of 7 December.

'ON THE GROUND! ON THE GROUND!'

At 14.30 hours, local time, the first news of the attack on Pearl Harbor reached Manila. The Philippines were certain to be attacked next. MacArthur needed to take positive action – to either launch Brereton's bombers at Japanese airfields on Formosa or get them immediately out of harm's way on Mindanao. But MacArthur did not give any such orders, and as the hours ticked by, nearly all the aircraft which had been sent off in the morning to watch for any approaching enemy machines had returned to refuel. They were sitting in rows at the fuel lines on Clark Field awaiting the attentions of the ground crew who were all at lunch. It was then that the first of 500 Japanese planes appeared above the blue skies of the Philippines. 'The sight which met us was unbelievable,' recalled the pilot of one of the Zeros, Petty Officer Saburō Saki. 'Instead of encountering a swarm of American fighters diving at us in attack, we looked down and saw some sixty enemy bombers and fighters neatly parked along the airfield runways … The Americans had made no attempt to disperse the planes and increase their safety.'[1]

The invasion of the Philippines underway. This image shows Japanese troops landing at Lingayen Gulf, on the northeast coast of Luzon Island, on 22 December 1941. These landings constituted the main element of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. (USNHHC)

Lester Tenney was in a tank battalion guarding Clark Field and watched the unfolding drama with dismay: 'The planes came over, and within a matter of ten or fifteen minutes, we had no aeroplanes left. Our B-17s were destroyed, our P-40s were destroyed. The few P-40s that tried to take off were damaged immediately; they never did take off. And so we lost almost all of our aeroplanes, on that first day.'

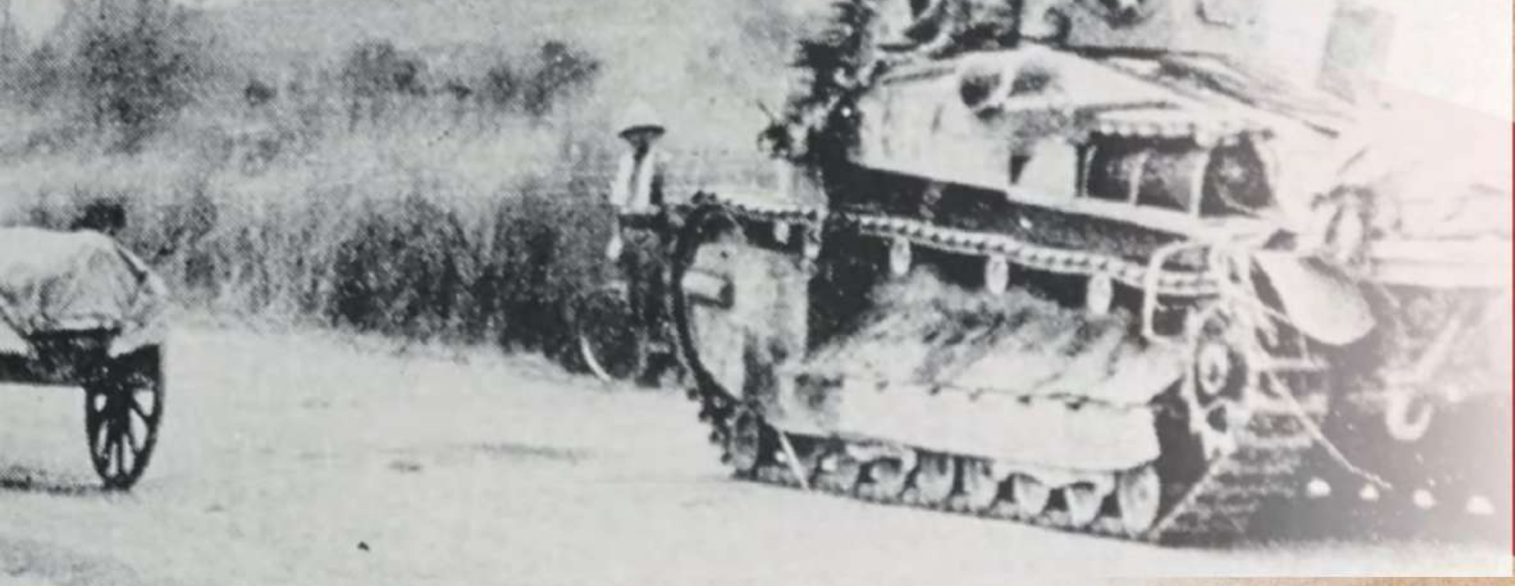
When Roosevelt was told how Brereton's aircraft had been caught unprepared, he was staggered. 'On the ground!' he exclaimed in astonishment, 'On the ground!'

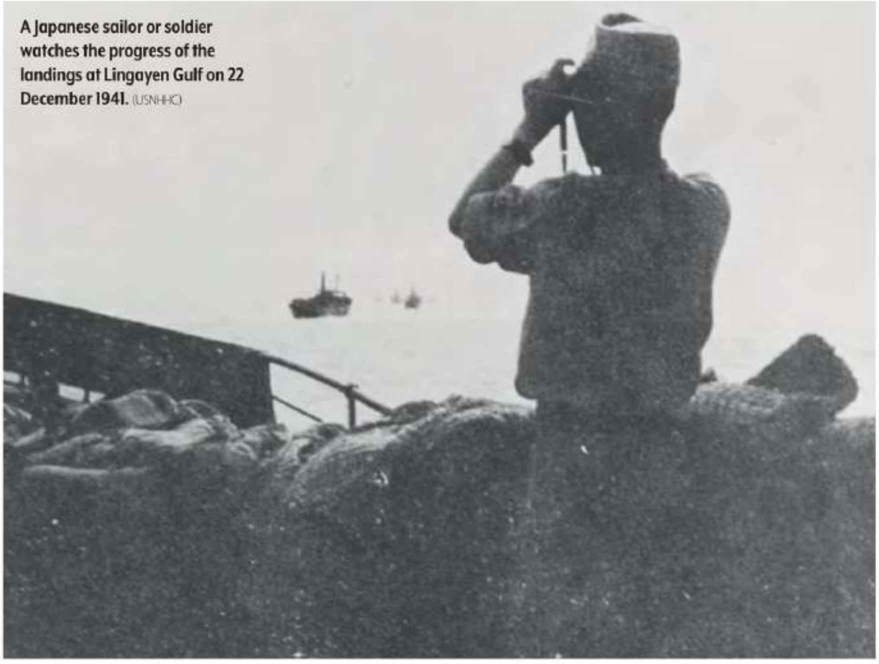
Worse was to come. With no aircraft to defend the Philippines, the ships of Admiral Thomas Hart's United States Asiatic Fleet were helplessly exposed to aerial attack, and unable to stop Japanese troops landing on the north coast of Luzon. Fortunately, Hart had dispersed his ships and only the submarine USS *Sealion* and the minesweeper USS *Bittern* were lost in the Japanese attack.

SURRENDER

On 12 December 1941, the Japanese 14th Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Masaharu Homma, began occupying Bataan Island off the northern coast of Luzon and the first landings on the south of Luzon soon began. Ten days later the main amphibious assault was delivered against the north of Luzon. MacArthur, in direct contradiction of the official American policy of War Plan Orange 3, had chosen to try and stop the enemy on the beaches. With an island the size of Luzon, this was utterly impracticable and over the course of the next few days, the Japanese broke through the thin US-Filipino defences and advanced steadily towards Manila.

Japanese troops move toward the Bataan Front, March 1942. (USNHHC)




A Japanese sailor or soldier watches the progress of the landings at Lingayen Gulf on 22 December 1941. (USNHHC)

Japanese troops moving up to the Bataan front in preparation for the general attack on 3 April 1942. (USNHHC)

Hart's surface and submarine fleets were withdrawn to the safety of Australia and, with no prospect of any help from the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, MacArthur finally adopted War Plan Orange 3. This was for the US and Filipino troops to withdraw to defensive positions on the Bataan Peninsula in the hope that they could hold out there until relieved by reinforcements.

On 9 January 1942, the first attacks were delivered by the Japanese against Bataan. By this time only the Baatan Peninsula and the powerfully fortified island of Corregidor, which guarded the entrance to Manila Bay, remained in American hands. The defenders held off incessant waves of Japanese attacks but eventually, weak from hunger and disease and with many men badly wounded, they succumbed on 9 April. MacArthur, who had moved his headquarters to Corregidor, was ordered to depart the Philippines for Australia so that such a senior general would not be taken prisoner by the Japanese.

Between 60,000 and 80,000 American and Filipino officers and men were taken prisoner, far more than the Japanese could easily handle. There were also some 40,000 civilians who had been trapped in the peninsula. Somehow, the Japanese had to move the prisoners out of the way so that they could launch their assault upon Corregidor, the final US position. As it was impossible to find transport for such large numbers of people to be moved to the

General Masaharu Homma, commanding the Philippine Expeditionary Force, comes ashore for the first time on Philippine soil, at Santiago on Lingayen Gulf, 24 December 1941. (USNHHC)

With the landings at Lingayen Gulf unopposed, Japanese troops quickly built up stores ashore, though a number of units had hit the beach in the wrong place. (USNHHC)

General Douglas MacArthur (centre) with his Chief of Staff, Major General Richard Sutherland, in the Headquarters tunnel on Corregidor, 1 March 1942. (NARA)

nearest railhead, the only choice was for them to walk – almost seventy miles.

THE MARCH OF DEATH

'We were slapped, pushed, beaten and yelled at while we marched,' recalled Julio T. Barela. 'If we slowed down, they would hit us with the butt of their rifles. I was hit often, and it made walking so much harder. Once you fell, you would be bayoneted and shot, sometimes beheaded.'

Just such an incident was witnessed by Captain William Dyess. 'The victim, an air force captain, was being searched by a three-star private. Standing by was a Jap commissioned officer, hand on sword hilt … The private, a little squirt, was going through the captain's pockets. All at once he stopped and sucked in his breath with a hissing sound. He had found some Jap yen.' It was assumed that the only way an American could possess something Japanese was if he had taken it from a dead Japanese soldier.

'He held these out, ducking his head and sucking in his breath to attract notice,' continued Dyess. 'The big Jap looked at the money. Without a word he grabbed the captain by the shoulder and shoved him down to his knees. He pulled the sword out of the scabbard and raised it high over his head, holding it with both hands. The private skipped to one side.

'Before we could grasp what was happening, the black-faced giant had swung his sword. I remember how the sun flashed on it. There was a swish and a kind of chopping thud, like a cleaver going through beef.

'The captain's head seemed to jump off his shoulders. It hit the ground in front of him and went rolling crazily from side to side between the lines of prisoners. The body fell forward. I have seen wounds, but never such a gush of blood as this. The heart continued to pump for a few seconds and at each beat there was another great spurt of blood. The white dust around our feet was turned into crimson mud. I saw the hands were opening and closing spasmodically. Then I looked away.'[2]

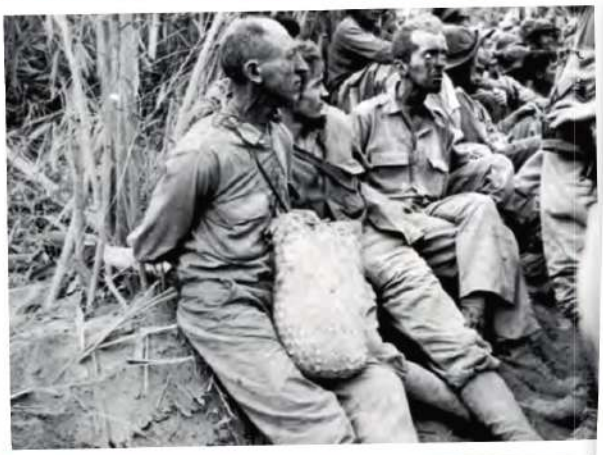
As the prisoners staggered on under a burning sun with no water and little rest, the men began to collapse in large numbers. In one typical case, recalled by survivors, one of the Americans crumpled to the ground and a guard went up and started kicking him in the ribs. The American tried painfully to drag himself up, but the guard placed the tip of his bayonet on the prisoner's neck and pushed hard. He then withdrew his bloody bayonet and drove it into the American's body.

Another US officer, driven to delirium, was laid into a hole dug by civilians. Suddenly realising his fate, the officer began to struggle to pull himself out of his grave. A guard ordered the civilians to hit the American with their shovels. They refused, until the guard raised his rifle at them. With faces twisted in agony, the Filipinos beat the American back into the hole and buried him alive, his hand clawing desperately in the air as he died.[3]

Eventually the prisoners reached the San Fernando railhead, only to be stuffed into overcrowded trucks in the sweltering tropical heat. The march ended with the prisoners being incarcerated in Camp O'Donnell, where many of the survivors of the march died. No one really knows how many died on the march, but of the estimated 80,000 prisoners which started out from Bataan, only 54,000 made it to Camp O'Donnell.

After the war Homma was held responsible for the treatment of the prisoners and, along with a number of other Japanese officers involved, was executed.

Japanese troops guard American prisoners of war at the beginning of the Bataan 'Death March' in April 1942. (NARA)



American prisoners of war with their hands tied behind their backs on the first day of the Bataan 'Death March', 9 April 1942. They are identified as, left to right, Private First Class Samuel Stenzler, Private First Class Frank Spear and Captain James Gallagher. All three were bound for having been found in possession of Japanese money, photographs or similar items. None of these three men survived captivity. Gallagher was killed later the same day that this image was taken; Stenzler died in Camp O'Donnell on 26 May 1942; whilst Spear was executed in a PoW camp in Japan on 9 July 1945. (United States Marine Corps)

Japanese Army Mitsubishi Ki-21 Sally bombers over Corregidor Island during April or May 1942. (USNHHC)

MANILA BAY

Though the resistance on the Bataan Peninsula had ended, US and Filipino troops still hung on in the island fortresses which defended Manila Bay, the principal one of which was Corregidor. For centuries the island of Corregidor had guarded the approaches to Manila, initially as a lookout post to warn of the approach of a hostile force and later as the first bulwark in the coastal defences of the Philippines' capital.

After Spain ceded the Philippines to the USA in 1898, a major construction programme was taken in hand to further fortify Corregidor and supplement the existing defences of Manila Bay. By 1914, the work was complete, the powerful forts and batteries being designed to withstand attack from the heaviest battleships then afloat. The military post on Corregidor was named Fort Mills.

Corregidor, which is three-and-a-half miles long and one-and-a-half miles at its widest point, could boast 23 coastal batteries, mounting a total of 56 guns, including ten 12-inch mortars, eight 12-inch guns, two 10-inch and two 8-inch guns. The advent of aircraft in warfare saw the addition of anti-aircraft guns and searchlights during the 1920s. These weapons, though, were controlled by a fire control system that was obsolescent by 1941, but by that date they included the modern mobile 3-inch M3 guns which would, to some degree, prove effective against the enemy bombers in the fighting to come.

The most significant development on Corregidor during the inter-war years was the construction of a vast range of tunnels dug into the solid rock of the 390-foot-high Malinta Hill, where stores of all kinds could be housed safe from aerial bombardment. The main tunnel, constructed of reinforced concrete in 1932,| was 1,400 feet long and thirty feet wide at its base, its walls forming an arch which curved 20ft above the floor. Along this main tunnel, 25 laterals branched out at either side, all of which were 150 feet long, except for one which led to a 300-bed hospital.

Covering the island were 65 miles of roads and trails, much of the heavy equipment on Corregidor being moved over an electric railroad, with more than 13 miles of track leading to all of the important military installations. Electricity also drove the pumps of the 21 wells on the island, powered the cold-storage plants that kept perishable food refrigerated, maintained the ventilation in the underground tunnels, and operated the heavy coastal guns. The garrison's survival depended on the continued running of the electricity power plant and it was well protected from aerial bombardment.

Such were the main, but not the only defences of Corregidor. At some stage, if the enemy was to capture the island, they would have to land ground forces. So, to supplement the big guns, barbed wire was stretched along those beaches which offered possible landing sites, mines were laid and bunkers were erected deep in the ravines leading to the highest and main part of the island, Topside, where the bulk of the installations were to be found, as well as the intermediary Middleside. As might be guessed, the lowest part of Corregidor was called Bottomside.

Japanese artillery bombarding Corregidor, April-May 1942. (USNHHC)

The number of personnel on the island by late 1941 was around 13,000, of whom a little less than 2,000 were civilians. Whilst this sounds a strong force, only 4,400 or so were US Army soldiers with 1,352 Marines. The remainder were either US Navy personnel (1,715) or Filipinos, few of whom had ever received any infantry training. Two battalions of the 4th Marine Regiment under Colonel Samuel L. Howard were detailed to defend the beaches.

THE BATTLE FOR CORREGIDOR

It was not until 29 December that the Japanese finally turned their attention to Corregidor. It was at 11.54 hours that day, that 18 enemy bombers appeared over the island and attacked the various headquarters buildings and barracks. First Lieutenant Sidney F. Jenkins, with the 4th Marines, remembered, 'bombs screaming to earth with shattering explosions, the crack of AA guns, the neat "plop plop" of the AA shells bursting all over the sky … There we were, the whole regiment flat on our bellies on the lower deck of Middleside Barracks.'

The attack lasted for 30 minutes, during which time almost 50 bombs were dropped – and there were more to come. Half an hour later, Japanese aircraft returned to continue the aerial bombardment. In the two hours of the attack, the Japanese unloaded approximately 60 tons of bombs on the island.

Fortunately, the main defensive structures had escaped relatively unscathed, but the barracks and the headquarters building, amongst many others, were badly damaged. Around 60% of all the wooden structures were destroyed. Many of the other buildings were made of corrugated iron which, when hit, exploded into large metal splinters. According to Major Achille Tisdelle, after the raid Bottomside appeared to be 'one huge mass of jagged and bent sheet iron'.[4] As a result, headquarters was moved down into the Malinta tunnel.

The Japanese had not got away scot-free, however, with the anti-aircraft gunners bringing down 13 heavy bombers and four dive bombers. At this stage the other forts in Manilla Bay, those of Fort Drum on the islet of El Fraile, Fort Hughes on Caballo Island, and Fort Frank on Carabao Island, as well as Bataan Peninsula itself, were still in US hands and their fire contributed to the success of the day. Command of all the forts in Manila Bay was in the hands of Major General George F. Moore.

The Japanese returned intermittently throughout the course of the following few days, but it was not until 2 January that they came back in force. Their approach concealed by cloud, 54 bombers broke through to deliver their payloads. By the time they had departed scarcely any part of Corregidor had escaped unscathed, and the island's railway line was smashed. The next four days saw the island pounded mercilessly until, on 6 January, Homma lost the major part of his air support, which was diverted for a pending attack on Thailand.[5] In addition, Homma's attention was focussed on Bataan and his assault on the US-Filipino positions the very next day.

THE ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT

With the enemy concentrating on seizing Bataan, Corregidor was temporarily ignored by the Japanese, but it was not forgotten. A Japanese artillery unit, called the Kondo Detachment after its commander, was spotted by observers on the mainland secretly erecting gun positions near Ternate, between six and eight miles from the island forts in Manila Bay. Initially, Major Toshinori Kondo's battery consisted of four 105mm guns and two 150mm cannon.

At 08.00 hours on 5 February, the Kondo Detachment opened fire, its principal target being Fort Drum, the so-called 'Concrete Battleship'. This tiny, but incredibly strongly defended island, was struck almost 100 times in a bombardment lasting three hours. The Americans tried to strike back, but the batteries on Corregidor had been designed to meet a seaborne attack and only a few guns could be traversed to counter the enemy. Both Fort Drum and Fort Frank were bombarded every morning for the following ten days, though Corregidor suffered only the occasional strike during this period.

The intensity of the bombardment increased, however, from the middle

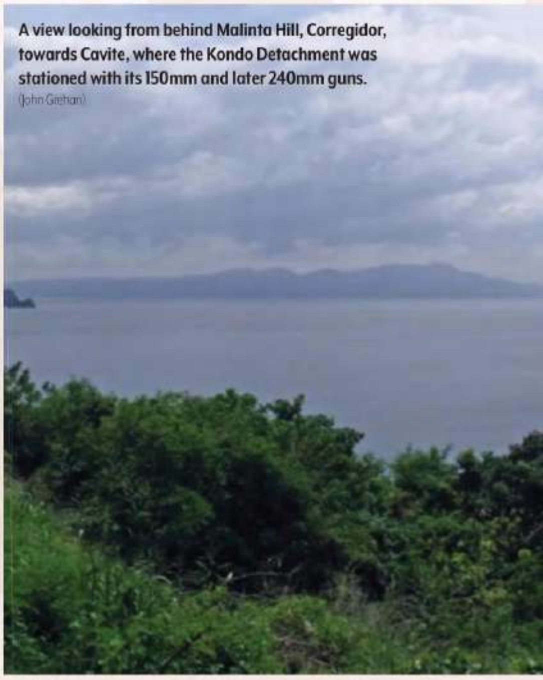
The US flag is lowered on Corregidor after the island's capture by the Japanese on 6 May 1942. (USNHHC)

A picture taken on 24 April 1942, during the Siege of Corregidor. It shows men sheltering in Lateral No.12 off the Malinta Tunnel. Code machines and telegraph operators of the Signal Corps message centre are behind the partition at the right rear. The photograph was taken from the island on 3 May 1942, by the last submarine, believed to be USS *Spearfish*, to call there. (USNHHC)

A number of small Japanese boats underway off Corregidor Island at the time of its capture in May 1942. (USNHHC)

"There we were, the whole regiment flat on our bellies."

Evidence of the battering endured by Corregidor is still starkly visible to this day. The structure seen here, the exposed Middleside Barracks, was devastated in the early bombing and was not rebuilt by the Japanese. (John Grehan)



A view looking from behind Malinta Hill, Corregidor, towards Cavite, where the Kondo Detachment was stationed with its 150mm and later 240mm guns. (John Grehan)

of February when Kondo's battery was reinforced by the addition of two 150mm howitzers. As it was clear that Corregidor could not hold out much longer, MacArthur, as mentioned previously, was ordered to leave the island. On 12 March command devolved upon General Jonathan Wainwright.

The pressure on Corregidor and the other forts was stepped up even further on 15 March after the Kondo Detachment was dissolved and a new much-larger unit, the Hayakawa Detachment, was formed under Colonel Masayoshi Hayakawa. The new detachment was composed of the 1st Heavy Artillery Regiment and the 2nd Independent Heavy Artillery Battery, both equipped with huge 240mm howitzers, which began to hammer the Manila Bay forts. Hayakawa opened fire on the morning of the 15th, with Fort Drum and Fort Frank receiving the heaviest treatment, the latter being hit by approximately 500 shells.

Day after day, the forts were subject to terrible punishment. Most of Fort Frank's armament was put out of action, and on one occasion a howitzer shell penetrated the 18in thick roof of one of its tunnels and exploded amongst a line of men, killing 28 and wounding a further 46.

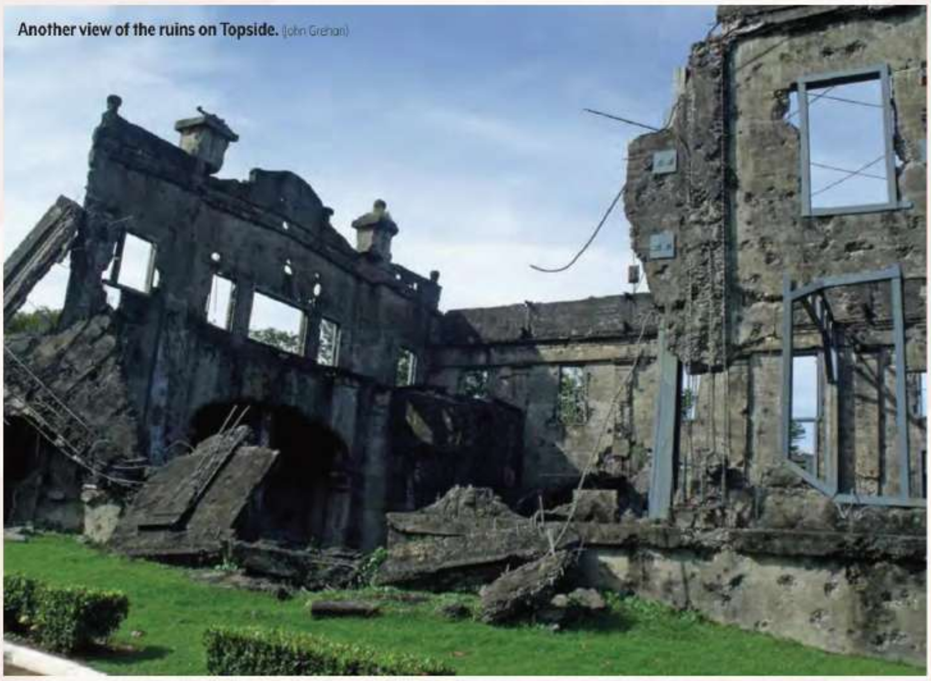
Worse, though, was soon to come, for on 9 April, the troops on Bataan surrendered and the Japanese could bring all their artillery to bear on Corregidor. Some indication of what the men experienced during the Japanese bombardment was described by Captain John Gulick, commander of Battery C, 91st Coast Artillery: 'To my terror it [the barrage] began to move toward us. There was a high rocky hill to my right and another to my left. Neither afforded any shelter whatsoever. We began to run, hoping to get around the side of the hill. The barrage walked after us at about a pace equal to our own.

'We rounded the hill and saw in front of us the ruins of the Ordnance warehouses blown up by bombs in December. The ground was heap after heap of concrete chunks and exploded 75 shells and casings. Suddenly the barrage behind us lifted and came down about 400 yds in front of us slightly to our left. We ran to the right. The curtain of fire lifted again and came down on our right moving towards us. Terror and desperation seized us. We were panting, sweating, and scared. It seemed as if the Jap artillery was playing cat and mouse with us …

'We ran down the old trolley tracks with barrages or concentrations behind and on both sides of us. Suddenly again up ahead shells began to land … We reached a drainage ditch and threw ourselves in it. Dead leaves had cloaked its depth so that we sank down about 3 feet. It was hot,

The ruins of Mile Long Barracks, on Corregidor's Topside. This building is claimed to be the longest barracks in the world, hence the name. (John Grehan)

The buildings on Topside were also destroyed at an early stage in the bombing. These ruins were part of the garrison's leisure facilities. (John Grehan)



Another view of the ruins on Topside. (John Grehan)

dirty, and almost smothering. But we were so exhausted by terror and by running that we could only lie there panting and perspiring.'[6]

A similar disaster to that which occurred at Fort Frank was also to befall Fort Mills when, on 29 April, two Japanese 240mm shells fell on a group of men standing by the west portal of Malinta Tunnel. Fourteen were killed and seventy were wounded. Nurse Lieutenant Juanita Redmond was on duty in the hospital lateral: 'We worked all that night, and I wish I could forget those endless, harrowing hours. Hours of giving injections, anaesthetizing, ripping off clothes, stitching gaping wounds, of amputations, sterilising instruments, bandaging, settling the treated patients in their beds, covering the wounded that we cannot save.'[7]

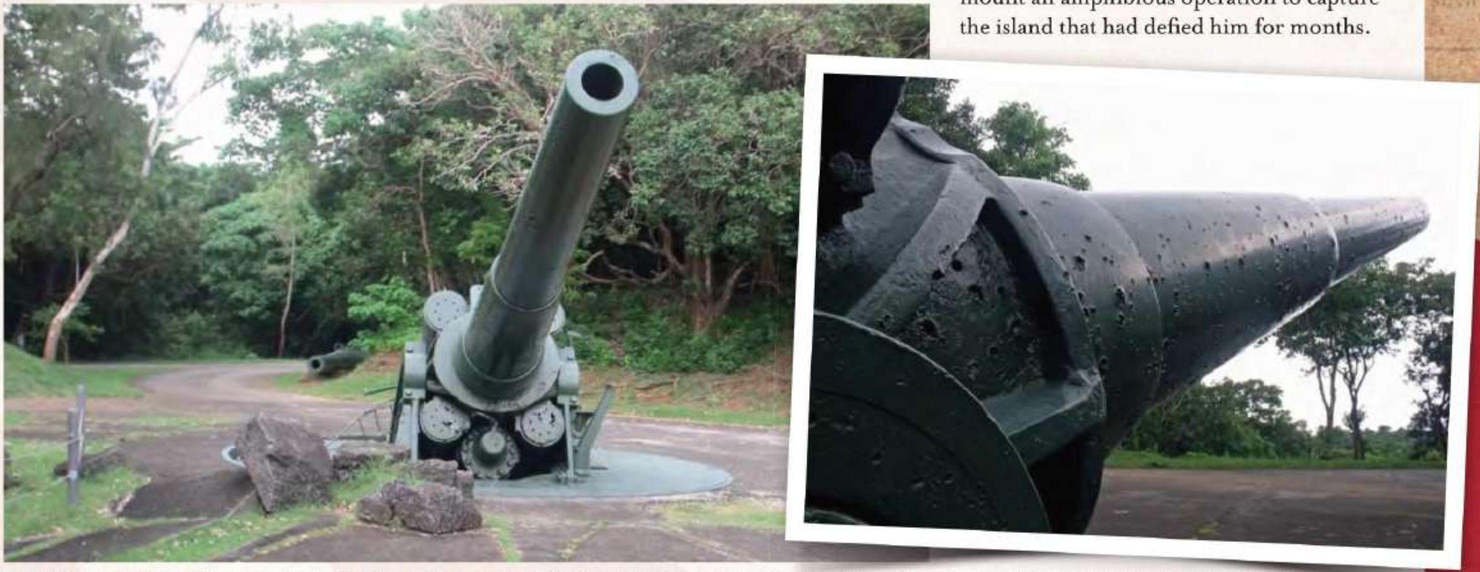
THE MOST BOMBARDED PLACE ON THE PLANET

With the Japanese devoting all their attention to Fort Mills and the bay forts, the intensity of the bombardment both from the air and the ground was staggering, as more enemy guns found firing positions at points on the Bataan Peninsula. In time, at least thirty-seven batteries were able to bring their weapons to bear on the battered, beleaguered island of Corregidor.

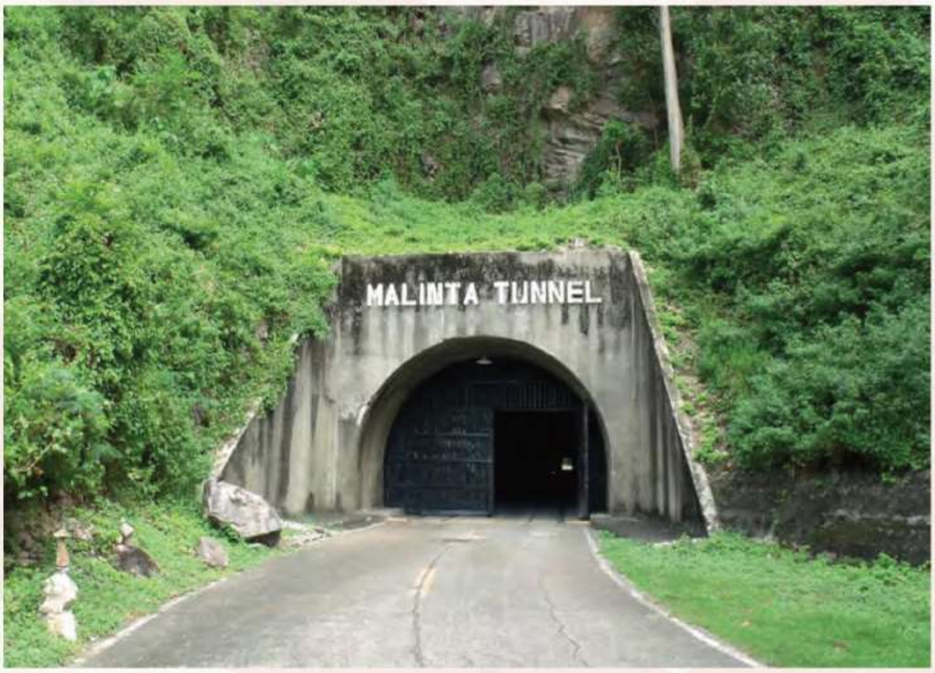
During that latter half of April and the early days of May, the Japanese mounted more than 300 air raids and delivered hundreds of thousands of shells – as many as 16,000 per day – on Corregidor. Eventually, most of the island's big guns were wrecked, with just one 12-inch mortar and a mobile 155mm gun able to attempt counter-battery fire.

Whilst considered to be the second most bombed place during the war after the Island of Malta, it is estimated by one renowned historian that Corregidor was 'battered and blasted by more tons of high explosive than any other spot of its size on the planet'[8]. No final tally exists of the number of bombs and artillery rounds that struck the island, but, according to Bill Sloan, early on the morning of 2 May, at the start of a typical combined enemy air-artillery bombardment, two of Wainwright's staff officers began counting the number of explosions. They determined that on average at least a dozen bombs and shells hit the island every minute for five straight hours – a total of 3,600 rounds, delivering an estimated 1.8 million pounds of explosives. After that, they stopped counting.

Yet still the garrison refused to give in. It was clear to General Homma that Wainwright and his men could not be bombed into submission. He was left with no choice but to mount an amphibious operation to capture the island that had defied him for months.



The 12-inch gun at Battery Hearn, Corregidor Island. It could fire a 1,000lb shell 30,000 yards every fifty-five seconds and had a full 360 degrees field of fire, though this was restricted by the surrounding terrain. It was served by thirty-three men under the command of Captain Samuel McReynolds of 59 Coast Artillery. On 12 February 1941, Hearn began firing almost daily upon the Japanese guns of the Kondo Detachment. After the fall of Bataan, on 9 April, the 12-inch gun at Battery Hearn ceased fire as it was an easy target from the high ground in Bataan. The extent of the damage inflicted upon the gun can still be seen. (John Grehan)



The west entrance to the Malinta Tunnel on Corregidor Island. (John Grehan)

The main east to west passage in the Malinta Tunnel is 1,400 feet long and 30 feet wide. Completed in 1932, it had 25 laterals branching out from it at regular intervals along both sides, as well as a separate underground hospital with its own 12 laterals. (Shutterstock)

THE LIMIT OF HUMAN ENDURANCE

Homma hoped to take Corregidor with ‘a sudden blow’ in which his infantry and tanks would mount two separate amphibious assaults on successive nights at opposite ends of the island. This was forced upon Homma as he lacked sufficient craft to land all the troops in one go. It was expected that Fort Mills would fall on Day 2 of the operation, which would begin on the evening of 6 May, the landing craft departing shortly after dark to deposit the troops on the island at 23.00 hours.

In preparation for the attack, the Japanese stepped up their bombardment of Corregidor even further. First Lieutenant Jenkins, whose Reserve Company of the 4th Marines was guarding Corregidor’s East Sector, remembered how it was ‘practically impossible to get any rest or to repair any damage to our positions and barbed wire. Our field telephone system was knocked out; our water supply was ruined (drinking water had to be hauled from the other end of the island in large powder cans) … Corregidor was enveloped in a cloud of smoke, dust, and the continuous roar of bursting shells and bombs. There were many more casualties than we had suffered in the previous five months.’[9]

There was, in reality, little the Americans could do to stop the Japanese when they landed on 5 May. When the following morning the invaders were just yards from the Malinta Tunnel, where there were around 1,000 helpless wounded soldiers, Wainwright surrendered. In his final communication from Corregidor, Wainwright told President Roosevelt, ‘There is a limit of human endurance, and that point has long been passed’.

Japan had conquered the Philippines.

Remains of the thirteen-and-a-half miles of railway track for the electric train which ran around Fort Mills on Corregidor, largely destroyed by the Japanese bombing and shelling. (John Grehan)

Shell damage to the wall round Battery Way, one of the gun emplacements on Corregidor. *Battery Way* was a *battery* of four 12-inch mortars which, being obsolete, had been out of service for a number of years before the Japanese attack. It was partially re-activated and played a limited part in the battle for Corregidor. (John Grehan)

The Brothers in Arms Statue, the American-Filipino memorial on Topside, Corregidor, with the ruins of the former cinema behind. (John Grehan)

NOTES

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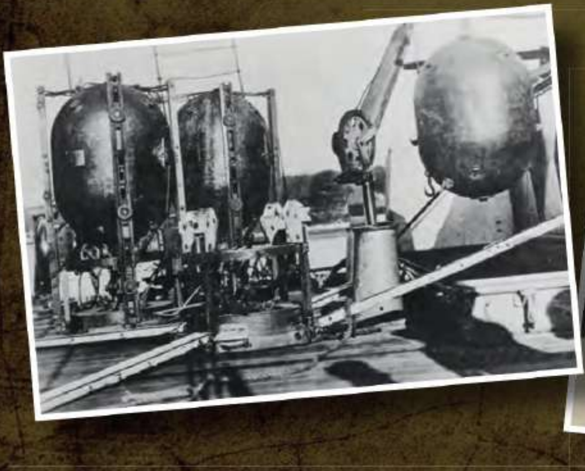

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SINGAPORE SURRENDER

On 15 February 1942, the British Army suffered the heaviest defeat in its history, when Lieutenant-General Arthur Ernest Percival surrendered Singapore to the enemy allowing 80,000 men to be taken prisoner – by just 36,000 Japanese.

Soldiers from the 2/9th Gurkha Rifles 'training with rifles, crouched in grasses' in the Malayan jungle in 1941.

(Library of Congress)

The landings on the Malayan coast that Admiral Phillips had hoped to disrupt with HMS *Prince of Wales* and Force Z were far from being unexpected by the British in Singapore. They knew that 'Fortress Singapore', with its powerful batteries of 15-inch guns, was virtually impregnable from the sea and that the only way the Japanese could threaten the island was from the north, through Malaya. But this did not unduly worry British leaders. Most of the Malay Peninsula was impenetrable jungle, narrowing the potential battlefield to a slender ribbon of highways which serviced the rubber plantations that were the country's most valuable assets. With the main road south crossing numerous rivers, it was thought to be ideal territory for defence, and it was reckoned that it would take the Japanese months to force their way down to Singapore.

General Tomoyuki Yamashita, in command of the invasion force of the 25th Army, understood the difficulties Malaya presented. He realised that motor transport could be easily delayed by the British simply by blowing the bridges across countless watercourses. So he found a simple solution – bicycles. Each of his two divisions took with it 6,000 bicycles and just a few hundred motor vehicles. The space this saved on the transports he gave to tanks. He also forwent cumbersome artillery for easily transported light mortars.

'In Malaya, almost without exception, bridges were demolished in front of our advancing troops,' wrote Colonel Masanobu Tsuji, one of Yamashita's key staff officers. 'When all motor transport was loaded with officers, men and equipment, it would have reduced their speed to walking pace if they would have to wait for the advance of the infantry and the repair of bridges, and it would have taken over a year to break through eleven hundred kilometres. With the infantry on bicycles, however, there was no traffic congestion or delay. Wherever bridges were destroyed, the infantry continued their advance, wading across the rivers carrying their bicycles on their shoulders, or crossing them on log bridges held up on the shoulders of engineers standing in the stream. It was thus possible to maintain a hot pursuit of the enemy along the asphalt roads without giving them any time to rest or reorganise.'[1]

BLAIR CASTLE

Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders training with a Mk.I Lanchester 6x4 armoured car in Malaya. Note the name *Blair Castle* on the vehicle's hull. (Library of Congress)

A member of the crew of a Lanchester armoured car of the 2nd Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders 'practice in patrolling jungle roads [to] keep members of this famous regiment in full fighting trim for their special job', Malaya, 13 November 1941. The battalion fought at the Battle of Slim River, being one of the units that were decimated. Only ninety-four Argylls returned to British lines. (Library of Congress)

JITRA JITTERS

Yamashita demanded a 'driving charge' and with thirty or more tanks leading the way the advanced units (5th Division Reconnaissance Regiment and 1st Tank Regiment under Lieutenant Colonel Saeki) raced down the Malayan peninsula, reaching the town of Jitra on 11 December. There the 11th Indian Division was waiting in hastily prepared defensive positions.

Major General David Murray-Lyon, the 11th Division's CO, had hoped to have more time to fortify his defences, but the units sent out to delay the Japanese were swept back with ease, the British having no tanks whatsoever to oppose the enemy armour. One of those units, the 1/14th Punjab, was taken by surprise by the speed of the Japanese tanks and was all but wiped out. So too was the 2/1st Gurkhas, which was holding a bridge over a fast-flowing stream just to the north of Asun. The Japanese tanks were able to rush up to, and cross over the bridge, before the Gurkhas could react.

Quite the opposite situation caused the loss of another battalion when panic at the rapidity of the Japanese advance resulted in the premature demolition of a bridge on the Kodiang road. This led to a large number of men of the 1/8th Punjab being left stranded on the wrong side of a river.

Reinforcements for the defence of Singapore. Indian troops 'standing at attention prior to inspection soon after arrival in Singapore in 1941'. (Library of Congress)

Civil defence personnel pictured during a demonstration in Singapore. The original caption states that the photograph shows 'air raid wardens dousing an incendiary bomb in Singapore's central city square (Raffles Place). It is only, however, part of a regular weekly mass demonstration to make Singaporean[s] bomb conscious and informed.' (Library of Congress)

Murray-Lyon had, therefore, lost the best part of three battalions before the main battle for Jitra had even begun. Worse still was the news of a breakthrough by the Japanese to the south. This forced Murray-Lyon to seek permission from the General Officer Commanding Malaya Command, Lieutenant General Arthur Ernest Percival, to retire to a naturally strong, though unfortified, position further south at Gurun. Percival refused.

On the night of 11/12 December, the Japanese attacked the weakly held 11th Division line. The attack was beaten off, but it was evident to Murray-Lyon that it was only a matter of time before the Japanese broke through. On the evening of the 12th he once again begged Percival to let him withdraw and this time the lieutenant general relented. The 11th Division pulled out of Jitra, but a breakdown in communications resulted in some units being left behind. The withdrawal was little short of a disaster, and by the time the 11th Division reached Gurun it was in no

A formation of Lockheed Hudson aircraft of 8 Squadron RAAF pictured whilst operating from their base at Kota Bharu in Malaya, circa 1941. (Library of Congress)

state to face another Japanese attack. What is so remarkable about the enemy's success at Jitra is that Colonel Saeki commanded just 1,500 men. The British collapse against vastly inferior numbers would become a painfully common event throughout the Malayan campaign.

Though regarded by Percival as 'perhaps the best natural defensive position in Malaya', a large labour force which had been ordered to assemble at Gurun to fortify the area failed to appear and no work had been done. A Japanese attack on the afternoon of 14 December was beaten off, but during the night enemy troops penetrated down the main road and the entire headquarters of the 6th Indian Brigade, except for the brigadier, was killed. This attack created a gap in the British line. The rest of the division had to fall back to maintain a solid front, but the division was described as being in an exhausted and very disorganised condition and likely to be overrun at the next major Japanese assault.

There were also concerns that the entire division would be cut off from Singapore as the enemy, in the form of the 5th Division, had moved rapidly down the west coast of Malaya where the heavily fortified island of Penang sat. In 1936, Penang had been declared a 'fortress'. Its defence rested to a large degree on the aircraft stationed at the RAF base at Butterworth, on the mainland across the Penang Strait. While it had been estimated that it would require more than 500 aircraft to defend Malaya from the Japanese, on the outbreak of war there were only 158 planes in the country. Predictably, it did not take long for the Japanese to gain air supremacy, leaving Penang highly vulnerable. With the danger that Penang would soon be cut off from the mainland, and its garrison exposed to an aerial onslaught, Percival decided to withdraw all his troops from the island and concentrate his forces on the mainland. The island was occupied by the Japanese on 19 December. This was a huge blow to the moral of the British troops and to Britain's prestige. Worse, though, was to follow.

Japanese troops had overrun the airfields in the north of Malaya and were able to use their aircraft in direct support of their ground forces, much as Hitler had done in conquering Poland and France the previous year. In terrain that was difficult for artillery to be transported, the aircraft, flying untroubled above the jungle, were particularly effective. By 17 December there were only around 100 serviceable aircraft left to the British and the decision was taken to retain them for the defence of Singapore, leaving the troops in Malaya without air cover. This, along with the fact that the British had no tanks to oppose the Japanese armour, had a profound effect upon the Indian troops who comprised the bulk of the soldiers in Malaya.

Brewster Buffalo Mk.Is being re-assembled at Singapore following shipment directly from the USA. These particular aircraft equipped 67 Squadron RAF, which reformed at Kallang in March 1941. (Library of Congress)

Brewster Buffalo fighters in formation over Malaya prior to the fall of Singapore. (Library of Congress)

Dutch and RAF officers discussing patrol plans alongside what appears to be a Lockheed Hudson. (Library of Congress)

General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the Japanese commander who led the invasion of the Malay Peninsula and the capture of Singapore.

A local resident at Ipoh Station in Perak, Malaysia, pouring tea for a group of refugee women from Penang on their way to Singapore in the face of advancing Japanese troops. (Historic Military Press)

The Japanese appeared unstoppable and the last week of December saw the remaining elements of 3 Indian Corps pushed back behind the River Perak. All hope of stopping the Japanese rested with the reinforcements, which included numbers of sorely needed Hawker Hurricane fighters, which it was known were on their way. Consequently, Percival's commanding officer, the Commander-in-Chief Far East, General Archibald Wavell, insisted that convoy protection should take priority over any other Air Force operation.

'DEFENCES ARE BAD FOR MORALE'

The Indian regiments were not the only Commonwealth troops in Malaya. Men of the Australian Imperial Force were also present in the form of the 8th Australian Division. After yet another disastrous engagement with the Japanese at the Battle of Slim River, which raged from 6 to 8 January 1942, the 11th Division was replaced by Major-General Gordon Bennett's Australians. They encountered the Japanese for the first time on 14 January at the battle to take the key port of Muar on the west coast of the state of Johore (today's Johor). Though the Australians inflicted heavy casualties among the enemy in the initial encounter, the result of the battle was once again a severe defeat for the British, followed by an even more catastrophic retreat. Among the 3,000 British, Indian and Australians who were killed, were 145 who were executed after being taken prisoner, a foretaste of the horrors to come for many who fell into the hands of the Japanese.

Indian Army engineers are pictured preparing a bridge for demolition near Kuala Lumpur after the Japanese landings. (Historic Military Press)

Johore is the most southerly of the Malayan states and is separated from Singapore by a thirty-mile-long strait which at its narrowest is just three-quarters of a mile wide. The Japanese, in the course of just two weeks, had advanced the length of the Malayan peninsula and just one final defensive line stood between Yamashita's men and that narrow strait. The Batu Pahat–Kluang–Mersing line was a line in name only as Percival had dismissed requests from his Chief Engineer, Brigadier Ivan Simson, to fortify the position, remarking that 'defences are bad for morale'. Nevertheless, Percival intended to fight there for the defence of Singapore.

On 20 January, Wavell visited Singapore. He found that despite the instructions he had given for preparation of defences in the northern part of Singapore Island, very little had been done. He told Percival to try to hold the enemy on the mainland until further reinforcements arrived; but to make every preparation for defence of the island.

Inevitably, the Japanese were able to pierce this extended line and, once again, threatened to cut off large bodies of British troops. On 26 January, Percival was given permission to withdraw his forces to Singapore Island.

TO THE BITTER END

As had happened all too frequently in this short campaign, the withdrawal of the British troops did not go well, with the 8th Indian Brigade becoming isolated from the rest of the 9th Indian Division. Despite a three-day trek to try and find their way through the jungle, only about 100 men managed to be rescued and ferried across the Johore Strait to Singapore. Other than this remnant, the last British troops withdrew across the Johore–Singapore Causeway on 31 January 1942, after which the structure was demolished. The Battle of Singapore was about to begin.

Yamashita took several days to conduct a reconnaissance of the Johore Strait and allow his troops to regroup prior to his assault on Singapore. During this time, the plan of invasion was developed. The Imperial Guards Division would make a feint attack to the northeast side of Singapore by landing on nearby Palau Ubin Island on 7 February. The 5th and 18th divisions would remain concealed in the dense jungle until the evening of the 8th, when they would cross the Johore Strait onto the northwest side of Singapore Island. Yamashita anticipated the campaign would be over within four days.

Although seemingly unstoppable, having conquered the 700-mile length of Malaya in just fifty-five days, Yamashita was concerned about the possibility of a protracted fight for Singapore. He had good cause to worry. He knew he could lose the upcoming battle for several reasons. First, he had lost over 4,500 personnel thus far and knew his remaining 30,000 men would have their hands full when facing the roughly 100,000 defenders of Singapore under the immediate command of Percival. Second, because of the exceedingly long supply lines, he had received little Japanese equipment since early in the campaign. Much had been requisitioned along the way, but this would be insufficient to keep his troops supplied throughout a protracted siege. Of even greater concern to the Japanese commander was the fact that his troops' ammunition was approaching critically low levels. Astonishing victory could quickly turn into a terrible defeat if the British held out for weeks. Yamashita, therefore, did what generals have done in sieges since time immemorial – he tried to bluff his way into Fortress Singapore, as he was proud to admit: 'My attack on Singapore was a bluff … I knew that if I had to fight long for Singapore, I would be beaten. That is why the surrender had to be at once. I was very frightened all the time that the British would discover our numerical weakness.'[2]

Percival had lost some 30,000 men already in the campaign, but he still outnumbered the enemy by around three to one. All he had to do was hold on, as Churchill made very clear to Wavell: 'I think you ought to realise the way we view the situation in Singapore. It was reported to the Cabinet by the C.I.G.S. [Chief of the Imperial General Staff] that Percival has over 100,000 men, of whom 33,000 are British and 17,000 Australian. It is doubtful whether the Japanese have as many in the whole of Malay peninsula, namely five divisions forward and a sixth coming up [Yamashita had only three infantry divisions for the assault upon Singapore].

'In these circumstances the defenders must greatly outnumber Japanese forces who have crossed the straits, and in a well-contested battle they should destroy them. There must at this stage be no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population. The battle must be fought to the bitter end at all costs. The 18th Division has a chance to make its name in history. Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops. The honour of the British Empire and of the British Army is at stake. I rely on you to show no mercy to weakness in any form … the whole reputation of our country and our race is involved.'[3]

Towering clouds of pungent smoke rise hundreds of feet in the air as a rubber factory and its stocks are destroyed by the British forces in Malaya during their retreat to Singapore, December 1941. (Historic Military Press)

Japanese troops in action in the streets Kuala Lumpur on 11 January 1942, during their offensive in the Malay Peninsula. (Australian War Memorial; 127893)

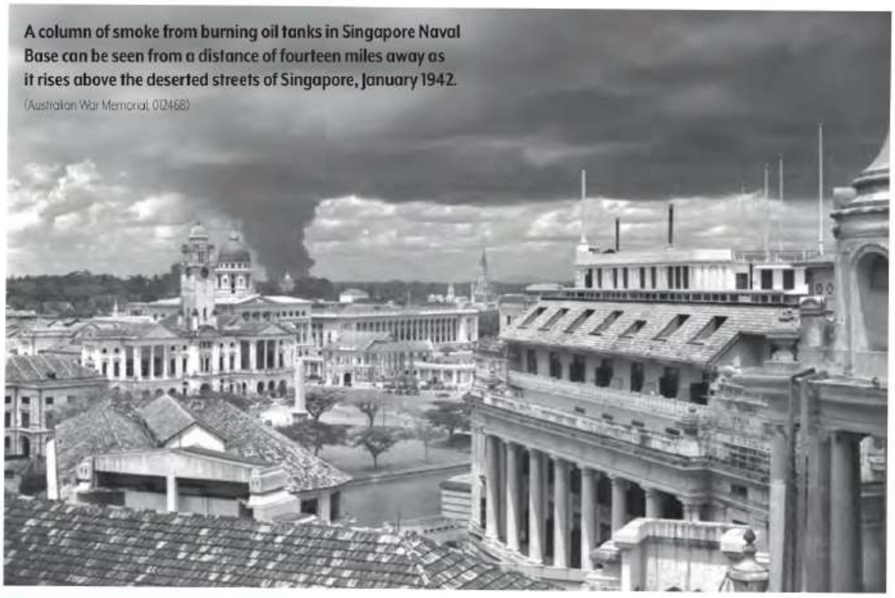
Singapore under attack. The original caption states that this image shows 'a bird's-eye view of Singapore during a Japanese air raid'. (Historic Military Press)

Australian gunners on Singapore Island waiting for the Japanese to cross the Johore Strait. Churchill said that if the Japanese broke across the Johore Strait in small boats – which of course they did – it would be 'one of the greatest scandals that could possibly be exposed'. The tower in the distance is the Sultan's Palace, which was occupied by the Japanese who used it as General Yamashita's headquarters prior to the final assault on Singapore. (Historic Military Press)

This disparity in numbers is somewhat misleading in that many of the Allied battalions had only just arrived in theatre and had no previous battle experience. The local Malay battalions were only partially trained. It was also a sad fact that Singapore was a 'fortress' in name only. While the island boasted an impressive array of large calibre coastal artillery, these guns faced south towards the sea to protect Singapore from naval assault; there were virtually no defences in the north of the island opposite the Johore Strait.

With the force that he had at his disposal, Percival outlined his plan for defence as follows: 'The northern and western shores of the Island are too intersected with creeks and mangroves for any recognisable form of beach defence. The general plan in each area will therefore include small defended localities to cover known approaches, such as rivers, creeks and roads to the coast or tracks along which vehicles can travel.' Percival intended that these local strongpoints would be supported by mobile reserves which would be held in suitable assembly areas until called upon. As the Japanese had almost complete control of the air, these assembly points had to be well concealed from above. Percival expected the main Japanese attack to come from the north with the Japanese aiming to push directly south to Singapore town.

This was a sound plan, but it relied upon secure and rapid communication between the local strongpoints and the reserves in the assembly areas. In a place like Singapore which, apart from the densely populated Singapore town, is mainly covered in dense rubber and other plantations, to reach a threatened position the defenders would have to travel along the roads where they could easily be targeted by Japanese aircraft.



A column of smoke from burning oil tanks in Singapore Naval Base can be seen from a distance of fourteen miles away as it rises above the deserted streets of Singapore, January 1942. (Australian War Memorial, 012468)

WAVELL DECIDES

On the night of 8 February, the Japanese 5th and 18th divisions crossed the Johore Strait towards the Western Area of the island, which was held by the Australians. Due to heavy air attacks and shelling from the mainland, as might be predicted, communications were severely disrupted. Consequently, no signals could be sent to switch on the prepared beach lights and, in the main, the Japanese were able to land concealed by the dark. With the telephone lines being repeatedly cut by the bombing and shelling, the necessary reserves could not be called up, nor could targets be relayed to the artillery. Even when signals did get through to the gunners, such was the speed of the Japanese when they pushed inland, that the targets were changing quicker than the artillery could respond.

Japanese troops advancing in the Bukit Timah area of Singapore, 11 February 1942. (Australian War Memorial, 127901)

Women and children pictured on the quayside at Singapore prior to their evacuation shortly before the Japanese invasion. (Historic Military Press)

When they actually encountered the Japanese infantry, the Australians performed well, even forcing them back, sometimes in desperate hand-to-hand struggles. But generally, just as they had in their drive through Malaya, the Japanese avoided head-on confrontation, preferring to sneak round the flank of the defenders. As Percival still expected the main enemy assault to be delivered from the north, he did not send any troops to the west to help the Australians. By the time he sent reinforcements it was too late as the Japanese were already firmly established on the island.

A recreation of the meeting at which, on the morning of 15 February 1942, Lieutenant General Arthur Percival and his senior officers took the decision to surrender. This recreation was established in the very room used at the time – the 'Commander, Anti-Aircraft Defence Room' – and which formed part of Percival's Headquarters Malaya Command Operations Bunker. (Courtesy of Bryn Pinzgauer)

British soldiers, possibly of the Suffolk Regiment, who have just been taken prisoner by Japanese troops in Singapore, February 1942. (Australian War Memorial)

An indication of the confused nature of the fighting in the dense woodland is provided by Captain Reginald Burton of the 4th Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment, part of the British 18th Division, as he took his men towards the crest of a hill from where he had heard some sporadic firing: 'I realised that at last we'd come to grips with the enemy … We started to climb the hill and very quickly we ran into the wounded from A Company making their way painfully back … Some men were limping, others being helped along by less severely wounded comrades … For a moment our own men wavered. They had friends, even relatives, among the wounded, and their immediate reaction was to lend a hand. This was their first real experience of action.'[4]

As the Japanese pushed further inland, their engineers repaired the Johore causeway, taking just forty-eight hours to rebuild it in wood. Trucks and tanks were soon rumbling across, as were the men of the Imperial Guards Division. The fate of Singapore was sealed.

Though the Japanese had a large degree of control in the air, Wavell was still able to fly into Singapore on 10 February. He made two important decisions. The first was that the few remaining Hurricane fighters, which had been flying almost non-stop against the enemy, should be relocated to safer bases in the Dutch East Indies, but the Hurricanes would still be able to help defend Singapore from airfields in Sumatra. The second was that instead of continuingly falling back, Percival should mount a counter-offensive.

Wavell flew out and left Percival to continue the battle. The two decisions Wavell made only worsened the situation for the defenders, as no RAF fighters were ever seen over Singapore again and the counterattack resulted in further confusion and in the destruction in detail of the forces involved.

SURRENDER

Yamashita's men had achieved wonders in penetrating deep into Singapore, but he still needed a rapid conclusion to the fighting. So, on 14 February he issued an ultimatum to Percival to surrender 'in the spirit of chivalry' to avoid further loss of life among the millions of civilians trapped in Singapore town. Percival deigned to reply.

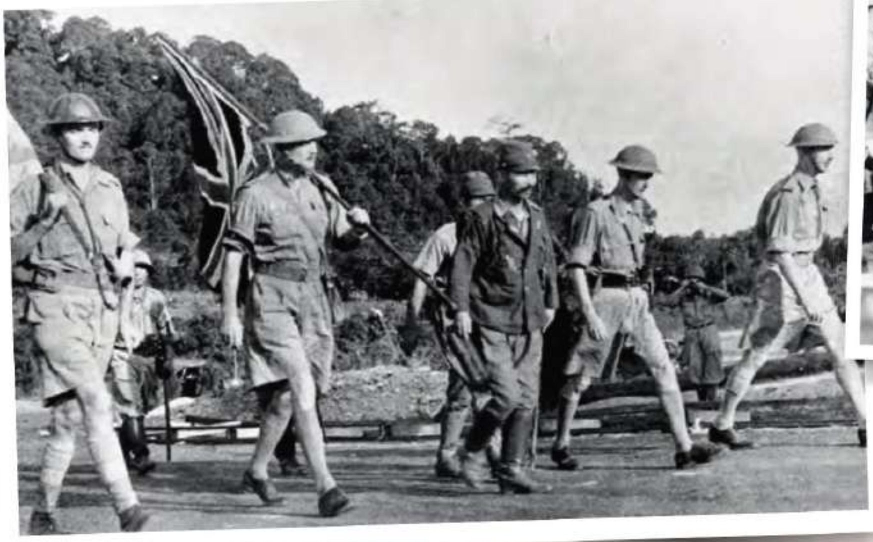
But the possibility of surrender was becoming ever more likely, which even Wavell acknowledged in what was to be his last message to Percival on 15 February: 'So long as you are in a position to inflict losses and damage to [the] enemy and your troops are physically capable of doing so, you must fight on. Time gained and damage to [the] enemy are of vital importance at this juncture. When you are fully satisfied that this is no longer possible, I give you discretion to cease resistance. Inform me of your intentions. Whatever happens, I thank you and all your troops for gallant efforts of [the] last few days.'

Permission to surrender had come from the highest levels – Churchill himself. The Prime Minister accepted that, 'I was sure it would be wrong to inflict needless slaughter, and without hope of victory to inflict the horrors of street fighting on the vast city, with its teeming, helpless, and now panic-stricken population.'[5]

Percival reviewed the situation with his staff and senior commanders. Food reserves were limited, while the Japanese had captured large stocks of food at Bukit Timah to the west of Singapore town. The Japanese had also seized control of the reservoir which fed Singapore

The bunker that housed Percival's Headquarters Malaya Command is now a museum, known as the Battle Box, which can be visited in Singapore's Fort Canning Park. (Alizada Studios/Shutterstock)

Japanese officers stand with Lieutenant General Arthur Percival on 15 February 1942. (Australian War Memorial)



Lieutenant General Arthur Percival and his party carry the Union flag on their way to surrender Singapore to the Japanese, 15 February 1942. Left to right are Major Cyril Wild (carrying white flag), interpreter; Brigadier T.K. Newbigging (carrying the Union flag), Chief Administrative Officer, Malaya Command; Lieutenant-Colonel Ichiji Sugita; Brigadier K.S. Torrance, Brigadier General Staff Malaya Command; and Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, General Officer Commanding, Malaya Command.

The moment that Lieutenant General Arthur Ernest Percival, front right with his back to the camera, formerly surrendered to General Tomoyuki Yamashita, sat on the far left on the opposite side of the table. The surrender was signed in the Ford Motor Factory, in the Bukit Timah area of Singapore, on 15 February 1942. The building still exists and is a national monument in Singapore. (Australian War Memorial)

and there was the possibility that the enemy might at any moment break into the crowded town with potentially horrific consequences for the civilians. While small arms ammunition was plentiful, the supply of shells for the 25-pounder guns was running very low. There was clearly no point in his troops simply remaining stationary hoping to fight off the Japanese, who were able to shell and bomb the town at their leisure. The choice they had was either to mount a counterattack to regain control of the reservoir and drive back the Japanese artillery, or to capitulate immediately. Percival considered only one of these options as practicable: 'I could see no immediate solution for the critical water situation and decided to capitulate. The other members of the conference concurred unanimously with this decision.'

Although Wavell had given Percival permission to surrender, he had said that all the time that his troops could inflict damage on the enemy, they should fight on. Many are the stories of the troops being both willing and able to continue to resist and of being shocked and angered at being forced to capitulate whilst still undefeated, but they might not have been aware of the overall situation.

After walking away from the conference with Percival, General Gordon Bennett saw the true extent of the effects of the Japanese bombing and shelling: 'There was devastation everywhere. There were holes in the road, churned-up rubble lying in great clods all round, tangled masses of telephone, telegraph and electric cables strewn across the street, here and there smashed cars, trucks, electric trams and buses that once carried loads of passengers to and from their peaceful daily toil. The shops were shuttered and deserted. There were hundreds of Chinese civilians who refused to leave their homes.

'Bombs were falling in a near-by street. On reaching the spot one saw that the side of a building had fallen on an air raid shelter, the bomb penetrating deep into the ground, the explosion forcing in the sides of the shelter. A group of Chinese, Malays, Europeans and Australian soldiers were already at work shovelling and dragging the debris away. Soon there emerged from the shelter a Chinese boy, scratched and bleeding, who immediately turned to help in the rescue work. He said, "My sister is under there." The rescuers dug furiously among the fallen masonry, one little wiry old Chinese man doing twice as much as the others, the sweat streaming from his body. At last the top of the shelter was uncovered. Beneath was a crushed mass of old men, women, young and old, and young children, some still living - the rest dead.'[6]

'A BIGGER INFLUENCE THAN WAS REALISED AT THE TIME'

The surrender of Singapore and the capitulation of some 80,000 British and Commonwealth troops was, and remains, the worst defeat in the British Army's 300-year history. Total losses for the whole Malayan campaign, including those taken prisoner, were 145,703. In his subsequent official despatch on operations, Percival had this to say about the Malayan campaign and the defeat of his forces: 'The retreat from Mons and the Retreat to Dunkirk have been hailed as epics. In the former our Army was able with the help of a powerful ally to turn the tables on the enemy; in the latter our Army was evacuated by the Navy with the loss of all heavy equipment. Each of these retreats lasted approximately three weeks.

'The Retreat in Malay lasted ten weeks in far more trying conditions. There was no strong ally to help us and no Navy to evacuate the force, even had it been desirable to do so. It has been hailed as a disaster, but perhaps the judgement of history will be that all the effort and money expended on the defence of Malaya and the sacrifice and subsequent suffering of many of those who fought in the Malaya campaign were not in vain. The gain of ten weeks and the losses inflicted on the enemy may well have had a bigger influence than was realised at the time on the failure of the Japanese to reach even more important parts of our Empire.'[7]

Elated Japanese troops on the waterfront in a part of Singapore, after the surrender of the British forces the previous day. (Australian War Memorial 127905)

This was wishful thinking on Percival's part. The next British target for the Japanese was Burma and, as we shall see, the forces there were as ill-prepared as those in Malaya had been.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Bill Yenne, *The Imperial Japanese Army, The Invincible Years 1941-42* (Osprey, Oxford, 2014), pp.108-9.
2. Alan C. Headrick, *Bicycle Blitzkrieg: The Malayan Campaign and the Fall of Singapore*, www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/PTO/RisingSun/BicycleBlitz
3. Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume IV The Hinge of Fate* (Cassell, London, 1951), pp.87-8.
4. Quoted in Colin Smith, *Singapore Burning, Heroism and Surrender in World War II* (Penguin, London, 2005), p.502.
5. Churchill, p.92.
6. Quoted in *Second World War Official Histories, Australia in the War of 1939-1945. Series 1 – Army - Volume IV – The Japanese Thrust* (1957), p.372.
7. John Grehan and Martin Mace, *Disaster in the Far East 1940-1942* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2015), p.338.

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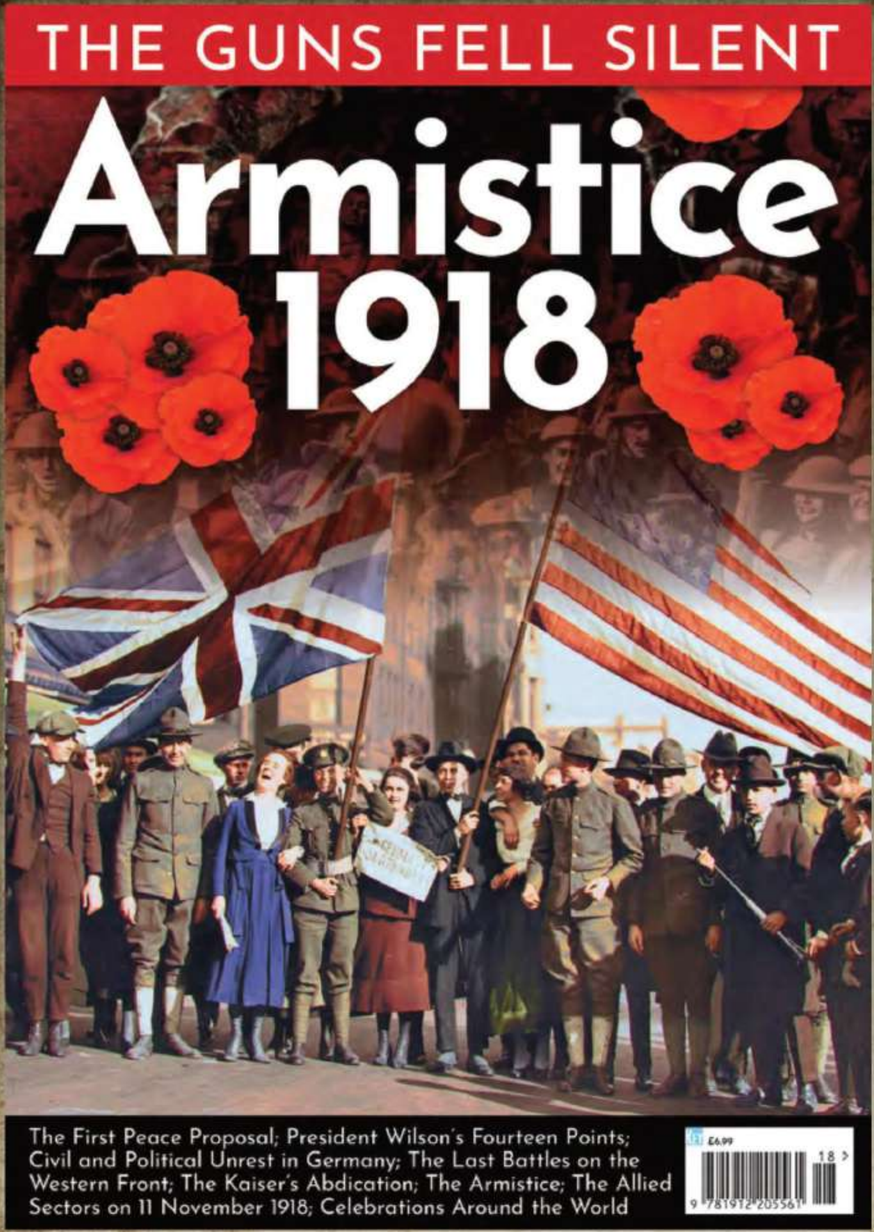

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BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA

One of the main reasons why Japan went to war in December 1941 was because of an embargo on oil imports to the country. The Dutch East Indies was at that time the world's fourth largest exporter of oil and one of the main Japanese targets.

The prime objective of the Japanese strike south was to secure their own supply of oil. The capture of the oil fields of north Borneo and the Dutch East Indies therefore constituted, in effect, Emperor Hirohito's end game.

On 11 December 1941, Japan declared war on The Netherlands and began the systematic bombing and occupation of Borneo, Celebes (today's Sulawesi) and other Dutch islands which commanded the approaches to the Java Sea. By the end of January 1942, the Japanese had seized the oil centres of Tarakan and Balikpapan in Borneo as well as its key ports and began to prepare for the assault upon the Dutch East Indies, today's Indonesia.

On 3 February, the first bombing raids were delivered against the port of Surabaya on the island of Java, and by the middle of February had completed their conquest of British and Dutch Borneo and Celebes and were ready to launch their invasion of the Dutch East Indies. By this date, the Allies had formed a unified command structure to try and halt the Japanese – the American, British, Dutch and Australian Command (ABDA).

However, Vice Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton RN, the senior naval officer at Batavia (now Jakarta), the capital of the Dutch East Indies, was under no illusions about the task he and his men faced: 'The forces at the disposal of the Allies in the ABDA area were never likely to stop the Japanese advance, as Japan could easily allocate stronger naval and air forces without incurring undue risks elsewhere. In the circumstances the only possible course for the Allies to hold on with what forces they could muster in order to deny the Netherlands East Indies to the enemy as long as possible. It was inevitable in so doing that we should expose ourselves to having our weak forces in the area overwhelmed, but this result was on the whole preferable to abandoning it without firing a shot.'[1] After the seemingly timid capitulation at Singapore, the determination of the forces at Batavia to resist the Japanese remained to be seen.

It was, in fact, on the day that General Percival surrendered, 15 February, that Japanese troops landed on south-east Sumatra

A formation of Japanese bombers attacking warships in the Java Sea, seen from the Royal Australian Navy light cruiser HMAS *Hobart*, 15 February 1942.
(Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial: P02620)

and promptly captured the important oil centre of Palembang. As all the Dutch troops in Sumatra, amounting to three weak divisions, were involved in the fall of Palembang, ABDA Command ordered the withdrawal of all remaining military assets from Sumatra to Java. This left the Japanese in control of all the air and sea approaches to Java from the north-west and, to some degree, the Sundra Channel which is the southern exit from the Java Sea.

On 25 February, the Japanese seized the Island of Bali to the east of Java. From its airfield they could control the eastern exit of the Java Sea. Java was all but surrounded. A report was received that a huge flotilla of 100 Japanese ships was heading for Java. The decision was taken to intercept the enemy flotilla – with disastrous consequences.

'CONTINUE ATTACKS TILL ENEMY IS DESTROYED'

That same day, 25 February 1942, ABDA Command was dissolved, and control of Allied naval forces was handed over to the Dutch in the person of Vice Admiral Emil Helfrich. It was under his authority that Rear Admiral Karel Willem Frederik Marie Doorman, who raised his flag in the cruiser *De Ruyter*, was to lead the Allied force to intercept the Japanese convoy. Doorman's force, the Combined Striking Force, consisted of two heavy cruisers, HMS *Exeter* and USS *Houston*, three light cruisers (HNLMS *De Ruyter*, *Java* and HMAS *Perth*), and nine destroyers (HMS *Electra*, *Encounter*, and *Jupiter*, HNLMS *Kortenaer* and *Witte de With*, USS *Alden*, *John D. Edwards*, *John D. Ford*, and *Paul Jones*).

Immediate efforts were made that very night to locate the enemy convoy, but without result. Then, at 16.15 hours on the 26th, a message was received from the naval base at Surabaya giving the location of the convoy and indicating that the Japanese transports were accompanied by two cruisers and four destroyers. The message had been relayed from Admiral Helfrich and ended with: ‘Striking Force is to proceed to sea in order to attack the enemy after dark ... you must continue attacks till enemy is destroyed.'

Doorman, though, had no aircraft available to him to track the enemy (even though three of his cruisers normally carried aircraft) so he decided to sweep along the north coast of Madura island and then trawl west as far as the Island of Bawean.

As it happened, at 18.30 hours, two USAAF B-17 bombers spotted the Japanese convoy and attacked it. This vital information was not passed onto Doorman until much later in the night, though the exact time is not definitively known. It seems likely that it was not until Helfrich repeated the signal directly to Doorman that the Striking Force commander received the message at 02.55 hours on the 27th.

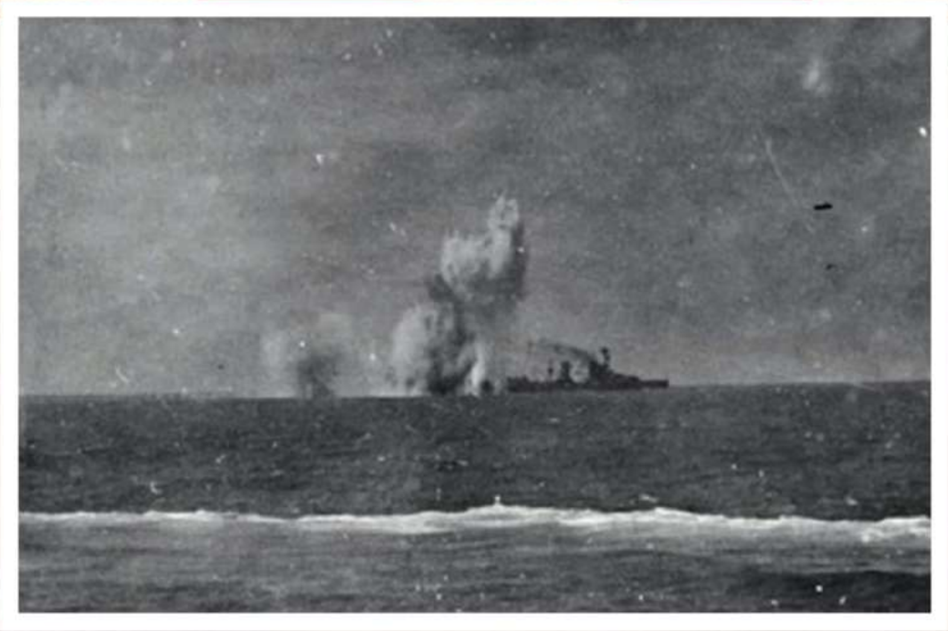
The cruiser HMAS *Perth*, ex- HMS *Amphion*, pictured in Gatun Lake, Panama Canal, during March 1940.
(USNHHC)

What is known is that a further message, timed at 03.25 hours on the 27th, was received by Doorman which gave him details of an enemy flotilla consisting of 'about' three cruisers and three destroyers.

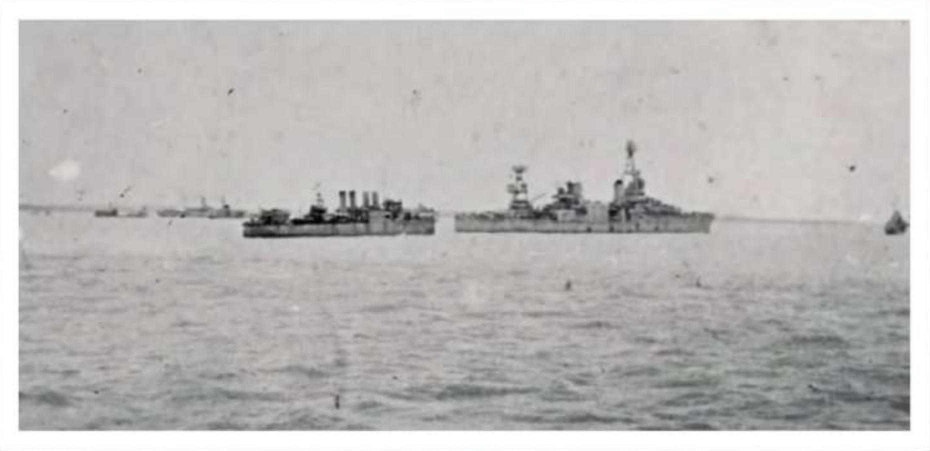
Doorman was in an unenviable position, not really knowing the size or intentions of his enemy. That position, though, was about to get much worse.

At 09.00 hours on the 27th, the destroyer HMS *Jupiter* was attacked by Japanese aircraft. Though none of the bombs hit the warship, the enemy planes continued to shadow the Striking Force – the enemy knew exactly where Doorman's ships were, but the Allies had little idea where the Japanese ships were. This was reported to Helfrich, who responded by writing: 'Notwithstanding air attack you are to proceed eastwards to search for and attack enemy.'

To this, Doorman advised Helfrich that: 'Success of action depends entirely on good reconnaissance information in time, which last night failed me.'



Bombs from a Japanese aircraft falling around the Dutch cruiser HNLMS *Java*. *Java* was bombed by Japanese B5N aircraft on 15 February 1942, without sustaining damage. On 27 February, during the Battle of the Java Sea, she was struck by a torpedo fired from a Japanese warship and sank 15 minutes later. It is possible that this image could also be showing the impact of the torpedo, which struck aft, breaking off the stern. (Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial, 305183)



Allied warships in Darwin Harbour between 15 and 18 February 1942. Centre right is the cruiser USS *Houston*, whilst the destroyer astern of her may be USS *Peary*. Among the ships in the background, to the left, are HMAS *Terka* and the SS *Zealandia*. The photographer was on board HMAS *Tolga*, which, at the time, was being employed as a water carrier for ships in the harbour. (USNHHC)

'THE FIGHT GOES ON'

As the search for the Japanese continued, Doorman's destroyers needed to refuel, and the Striking Force put into Surabaya. Just as the ships were entering the harbour, a message was sent which indicated that three groups of Japanese ships were at sea. The largest of these, two cruisers, six destroyers and twenty-five transports, was twenty miles west of Bawean. Doorman immediately turned around and put back to sea.

Now that the Allies had some solid information, the commander of the air defence at Surabaya, Rear Admiral Pieter Koenraad, wanted to attack the Japanese convoy with the few aircraft that he had at his disposal. This meant that when Doorman asked for fighter protection for his

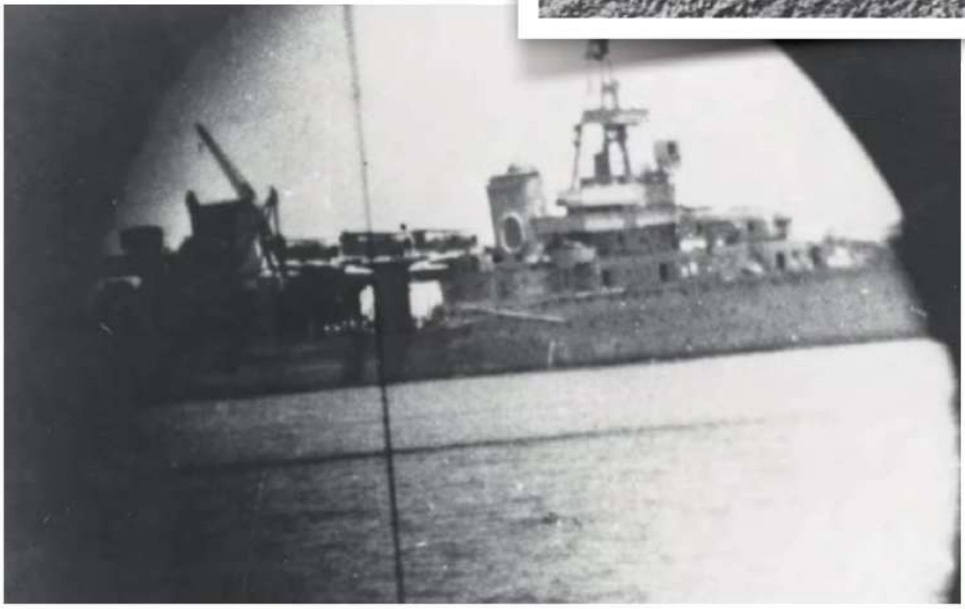
"Success of action depends entirely on good reconnaissance information in time, which last night failed me."

ships as they approached the Japanese convoy, his request was refused as Koenraad wanted his fighters to protect his bombers.

Doorman, nevertheless, ploughed on, finally sighting Japanese warships at 16.12 hours on the 27th. The enemy force was in fact the 5th Cruiser Division of the two heavy cruisers *Nachi* and *Haguro*; the 2nd Destroyer Flotilla of eight destroyers led by the light cruiser *Jintsú*; and the six destroyers of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla led by the cruiser *Naka*.

At 16.16 hours, *Nachi* and *Haguro* opened fire at a range of 30,000 yards, aiming their fire mainly at *Exeter* and *Houston*, whilst, at the same time, *Electra* came under fire from *Naga*. The Allied force steamed directly at the Japanese ships to reduce the range. *Exeter* and *Houston* opened fire at 16.17 hours at a range of approximately 27,000 yards.

A Dutch destroyer under attack in the Banka Sea during the fighting for the Dutch East Indies. According to the original caption, this is 'its last moments as it is subjected to a concentrated bombing attack'. This may be the destroyer HNLMS *Van Nes*, which was sunk off Banka on 17 February 1942. (USNHHC)



The cruiser USS *Houston* seen through the sight of an Australian 4-inch gun on the shore at Darwin, Australia, on 18 February 1942. At the time, *Houston* was en route to the East Indies and her rendezvous with the rest of the ABDA Command's naval force. (USNHHC)

The Japanese plan was to engage the Allied ships with torpedoes and at 16.33 hours, the first torpedo attack began. This involved the two heavy cruisers and the whole of the 4th Destroyer Flotilla. As the attack was developing, Doorman's flagship *De Ruyter* was hit by an 8-inch shell in the auxiliary motor room on the starboard side. A fire started but was soon extinguished.

The torpedo attack lasted 19 minutes, during which time the Japanese unleashed 43 torpedoes, none of which hit their targets. In fact, the only damage inflicted during the engagement was when *Perth* hit one of the Japanese destroyers.

The Royal Navy cruiser HMS *Exeter* and the Australian cruiser HMAS *Hobart* under aerial attack by Japanese aircraft on 14-15 February 1942. A Dutch destroyer is visible to the right. (Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial, P02935)

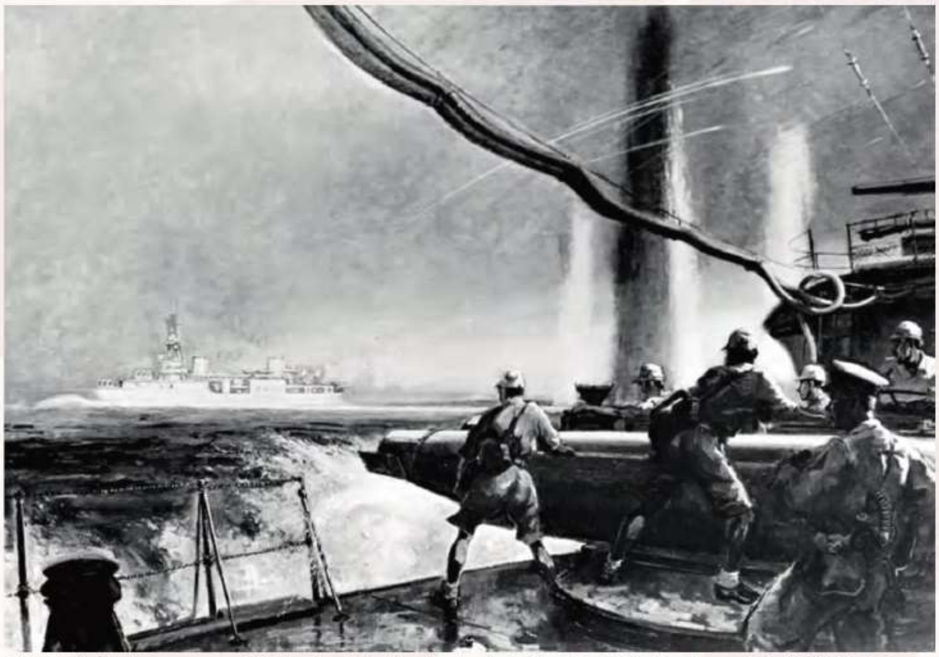
HMS *Exeter* sinking on 1 March 1942, after its engagement with Japanese cruisers off Java. Taken by a Japanese airman, this photograph was found by US troops when they liberated Attu Island in May 1943. (USNHHC)

Another view of HM *Exeter* sinking on 1 March 1942. Her wreck was located and positively identified on 21 February 2007, lying in Indonesian waters at a depth of about 200 feet some 90 miles northwest of Bawean Island. (USNHHC)

After the torpedo attack, the Japanese ships withdrew to regroup under the cover of a smoke screen. Doorman gave chase and *Haguro* was hit with black smoke billowing from her engine room.

Having regrouped, the Japanese launched a second torpedo attack at 17.07 hours. A Japanese report of this attack stated the following: 'The order "All forces attack" was given. An enemy ship blew up and sank, their formation fell into confusion, and they gradually began to reverse [their] course and retreat under a heavy smoke screen … during the execution of the attack the enemy's shells almost never scored a hit until a distance of 8,000 metres had been reached.'[2] A staggering 68 torpedoes were fired but only one Allied ship was hit, the Dutch destroyer *Kortenaer*, which was struck on the starboard quarter by a torpedo, blew up and broke in two. Forty men were lost.

It was actually a Japanese shell which had a greater effect on the Allied force than all the torpedoes. An 8-inch shell from *Nachi* hit *Exeter* and the cruiser's speed was severely reduced. At 17.15 hours, *Exeter* stopped, dead in the water. This threw Doorman's force into disorder, but the Dutch admiral knew he had to fight back, and he ordered the British destroyers to counter-attack. With a dense cloud of smoke blanketing the sea, reducing visibility to half a mile, they failed to find or engage a target. HMS *Electra*, however, almost bumped into a formation of three enemy destroyers in a break in the smoke. The Japanese ships turned away and, as they disappeared back into the smoke, a shell hit *Electra* in her No.2 Boiler Room. *Electra* stopped, listing to port, and the three Japanese destroyers returned to finish her off. They pounded *Electra*, and though her crew fought back with every weapon that could be brought to bear, the end was inevitable. She soon sank, White Ensign still flying, taking all bar 54 of her crew with her.



A drawing by the Japanese war artist Kobyakwa Tokushiro showing the Battle of Sunda Strait underway. Dated 1942, it depicts a torpedo tube crew in action on one of the Japanese warships. (US Army)

The disorder among the Allies grew as the fighting continued, with Doorman unable to locate many of his ships. A report by USS *Houston*'s Lieutenant Commander Arthur Mayer, gives some indication of how confused the fighting was: 'The disposition of the enemy vessels was such as to completely encircle the *Houston* … Enemy planes were overhead … Enemy ships believed to be cruisers or carriers were firing at the *Houston* from about 12,000 yards to seaward. Having established hitting range, they were pouring fire into the ship and causing considerable damage. Destroyers operating in formations of three to four ships were making repeated attacks upon the bows and quarters of the *Houston*, using both guns and torpedoes … All communication systems which were still operative were hopelessly overloaded with reports of damage received, or approaching torpedoes, or new enemy attacks begun, or changes in targets engaged.'[3]

It was not until 17.36 hours that Doorman became aware of HMS *Exeter*'s plight; he then ordered the cruiser to retire to Surabaya with the destroyer *Witte de With* being instructed to chaperone *Exeter* back to the port.

A third Japanese torpedo attack was attempted but ended, once again, with no Allied ships being hit. At 17.52 hours Doorman signalled to Helfrich: '*Kortenaer* sunk. *Exeter* damaged. The fight goes on.'

NIGHT ACTION

Despite his defiant claim, Doorman decided to disengage as night crept in. There was one notable Allied success towards the end of the fighting, however, when HMAS *Perth* landed two shells on *Haguro*, causing an explosion towards the aft of the Japanese cruiser. A fire started but this the crew was able to extinguish, and she was able to resume her

US Navy divers assigned to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 11 at work surveying the wreck of HMAS *Perth*, 19 October 2015. (US Navy)

position. Doorman's instructions had been to intercept the Japanese convoy and he aimed to try and find the troop transports rather than continuing the battle with the enemy's warships in the dark. Despite appeals from Doorman for more information about the location of the enemy, none were transmitted to him.

As the Striking Force ambled around trying to locate the convoy, the Japanese were strengthened with the arrival of the two heavy cruisers *Mikuma* and *Mogami*, a light cruiser and three destroyers. The odds were rapidly stacking up against Doorman's diminished force.

At 19.47 hours, the opposing forces sighted each other again and the Japanese attempted yet another torpedo attack, which also failed. Unfortunately, Doorman's force shrank further when the commander of the US destroyers announced that his ships were so low on fuel that they had to withdraw. At 21.00 hours, Commander Binford led his six destroyers back to port.

Just when it might be thought the situation of the Striking Force could not have got any worse, HMS *Jupiter* struck a mine and sank with the loss of 70 men. Then, at 22.30 hours *Nachi* and *Haguro* engaged the Allies, delivering the fifth torpedo attack 15 minutes later, which this time was a stunning success, with both *De Ruyter* and *Java* being sunk. Doorman's flagship actually remained afloat until 02.30 hours on the morning of the 28th, though most of the crew, including Doorman, went down with the ship.

Captain Hector Waller in HMAS *Perth* was the senior surviving Allied officer who could do nothing other than try to save the remaining ships, as he explained: 'I had now under my orders one undamaged 6-in. cruiser, one 8-in. cruiser [*Houston*] with very little ammunition and no guns aft. I had no destroyers. The force was subjected throughout the day and night operations to the most superbly organised air reconnaissance. I was opposed by six cruisers … and 12 destroyers.

'By means of their air reconnaissance they had played cat and mouse with the main striking force and I saw no prospect of getting at the enemy (their movements had not reached me since dark, and even then the several reports at the same time all gave different courses). It was fairly certain that the enemy had at least one submarine operating directly with him and he had ample destroyers to interpose between the convoy and my approach – well advertised as I knew it would be. I had therefore no hesitation in withdrawing what remained of the striking force.'

A RESOUNDING DEFEAT

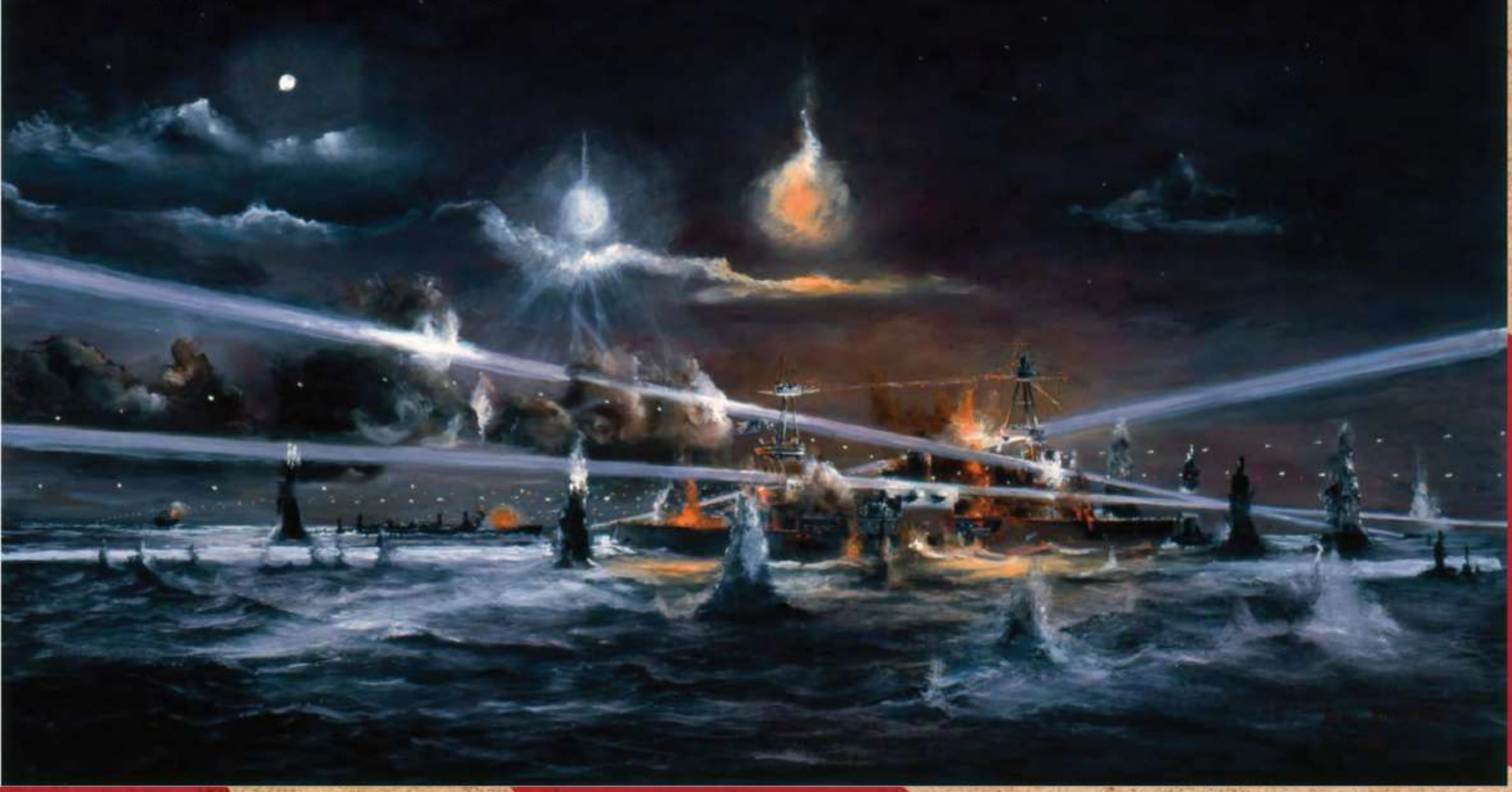
The Battle of the Java Sea was an unmitigated disaster to add to those of Pearl Harbor, Manila and Singapore. But more calamities were to follow. On 28 February *Perth* and *Houston* were ordered to sail to Tjilatjap, on the south coast of Java. As they sailed through the night, they were spotted and engaged in what is now known as the Battle of Sunda Strait. They were sunk at approximately 00.35 hours on 1 March after a battle in which five Japanese ships were sunk, three of them by friendly fire.

With the Allied naval presence in the Dutch East Indies all but wiped out, there was nothing left to stop the Japanese invasion. The remnants of the British and American air forces evacuated to Australia, while British and Dutch troops and some Indonesians fought on for a few days before being overwhelmed, to bring the Allied defence of the Dutch East Indies to a sorry end.

NOTES

1. TNA, ADM 234/326.
2. ibid.
3. Francis Pike, *Hirohito's War, The Pacific War 1941-1945* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015), p.307.

A painting depicting USS *Houston* and HMAS *Perth* during the Battle of Sunda Strait. (Courtesy of the US Navy Art Collection)



RETREAT FROM RANGOON

The small British forces deployed in Burma were wholly inadequate to defend the country against an aggressor and, when the Japanese attacked, the troops in Rangoon were forced to withdraw in what was to become the longest retreat in the history of the British Army.

Burma was not one of Hirohito's principal targets. Malaya would provide Japan with rubber, tin and other rare metals, whilst Borneo and the Dutch East Indies had the oil fields. But if the western colonial powers were to be driven out of East Asia, Burma could not be ignored. There was also a fledgling independence movement in Burma and the British and Indian force in the country was weak. So, while the occupation of Burma was not vital to Japanese war strategy, other than securing Malaya's western flank, it was psychologically important and was unquestionably ripe for the picking.

The conquest of Burma began in December 1941 with air attacks, the Japanese 5th Air Division striking at Rangoon, the Burmese capital, and British airfields. This Japanese force numbered around 150 aircraft, to oppose which Air Vice Marshal Leigh Stevenson had just 37 combat aircraft – from the RAF, the Indian Air Force and the American Volunteer Group. There was only one battery of anti-aircraft guns for airfield defence.

Indian troops training in Mandalay on 23 September 1941, prior to the Japanese invasion of Burma. (Historic Military Press)

Indian artillery exercises in rugged Burmese countryside in late September 1941.

(Historic Military Press)

Stevenson called for reinforcements and by 1 January 1942, his force numbered 53 aircraft – Curtiss P-40s and Hawker Hurricanes – but the Japanese had also been reinforced and now could count up to 200 machines. Stevenson wrote that, 'Fighter for fighter we were superior and it was only when heavily outnumbered, and without warning and proper airfield facilities, that the enemy were able to get a decision. Their bombers were "easy meat" for our fighters if interception took place.' Though the Japanese had been unable to gain air superiority, on 15 January, General Shojiro Iida's Fifteenth Army invaded the southern Burmese province of Tenasserim.

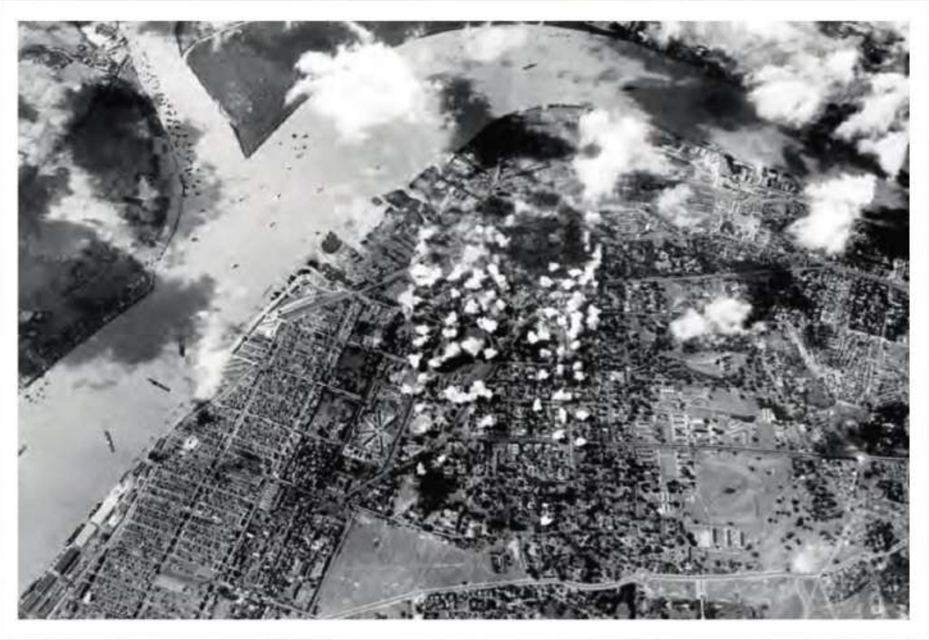
The main Japanese thrust, however, came from the east, with General Shōzō Sakurai's 33rd Division moving across the border from Thailand. The Japanese were clearly aiming for Rangoon, but in their way lay the 600-yard-wide River Sittang, and British hopes of stopping the Japanese rested on holding the line of this important waterway.

The first clash of arms, though, took place on the banks of another river, the Bilin, between 14 and 18 February. The 17th Infantry Division of the British Indian Army, which was holding the river was overwhelmed by two Japanese divisions and forced to retreat. It pulled back towards the Sittang with the Japanese close on its heels. What happened next still divides opinion. The 16th and 46th Indian infantry brigades had not reached the bridge over the Sittang by 22 January while enemy efforts to take the bridge had mounted. Brigadier Sir John George Smyth VC was faced with an agonising decision. If he tried to hold onto the bridge to give his two missing brigades a chance to fight their way through to the river, he risked the bridge being taken by the Japanese who would then be able to race through to Rangoon. If he destroyed the bridge, the Japanese advance towards the Burmese capital would be seriously delayed. Smyth decided that he could not risk the Japanese storming the bridge and at 05.30 hours that morning, it was destroyed.

Bill Norman was one of those troops stranded on the wrong side of the Sittang.

A company of soldiers from the Burma Rifles 'marches out from the old fort of Mandalay' during September 1941. Originally formed in 1917 from Burmese, Karens, Kachins and Chins, with some Gurkhas, by the time of the Japanese invasion the regiment consisted of 14 battalions, including a holding battalion, a training battalion and four territorial battalions.

(Historic Military Press)



Bomb bursts pictured from a Japanese aircraft during the first air raid on Rangoon on 23 December 1941. The Japanese aircraft, amounting to some 80 bombers and 30 fighters, had taken off from airfields in Thailand and Indochina. (Courtesy of John Tewell)

'On reaching the river bank,' he later recalled, 'I was surprised to see it deserted, not a soul in sight. While making up our minds as to how we could cross, a man appeared from nowhere who was from our platoon. He told me that the platoon had made rafts but they fell apart and he was able to scramble back to the shore. He feared that many had drowned.'

One of Norman's comrades found a very thick bamboo pole which he threw into the water. 'Clad in only our shorts we had a good drink out of the river and set off on our pole. It was nice to discover that we could wade about two hundred yards before we got out of our depth, pointing a pole at a landmark we swam ... Once again we lost all sense of time, we just swam and swam, resting every now and then.'

They eventually reached the other bank, so exhausted they were barely able to stand. 'We had done it,' wrote Norman, 'and the feeling of relief was something I could never describe.'[1] In fact quite a number of men were able to cross the Sittang and re-join their regiments.

Historian Jon Latimer called the disaster at the Sittang Bridge 'a defining moment in the decline and fall of the British Empire'. Wavell immediately dismissed Smyth who was never given another command.[2]

It was later revealed that Smyth had sought permission from General Officer Commanding Burma Command, General Thomas Hutton, to retire behind the Sittang ten days earlier. Hutton denied Smyth's request and as a result two-thirds of the 17th Division was stranded on the wrong side of the river. Hutton was superseded by General Harold Alexander. In all fairness to Hutton, he was merely following the orders of Wavell, who after passing on the appeal from Smyth had told him: 'I have every confidence in judgement and fighting spirit of you and Smyth, but bear in mind that continual withdrawal, as experience in Malaya showed, is most damaging to morale of troops, especially Indian troops. Time can often be gained as effectively and less expensively, by bold counter-offensive. This especially so against the Japanese.'

The Japanese eventually found an alternative crossing point and they reached Rangoon on 9 March 1942. The British had evacuated the capital two days earlier – Wavell was determined to make sure there was a Singapore-style surrender.

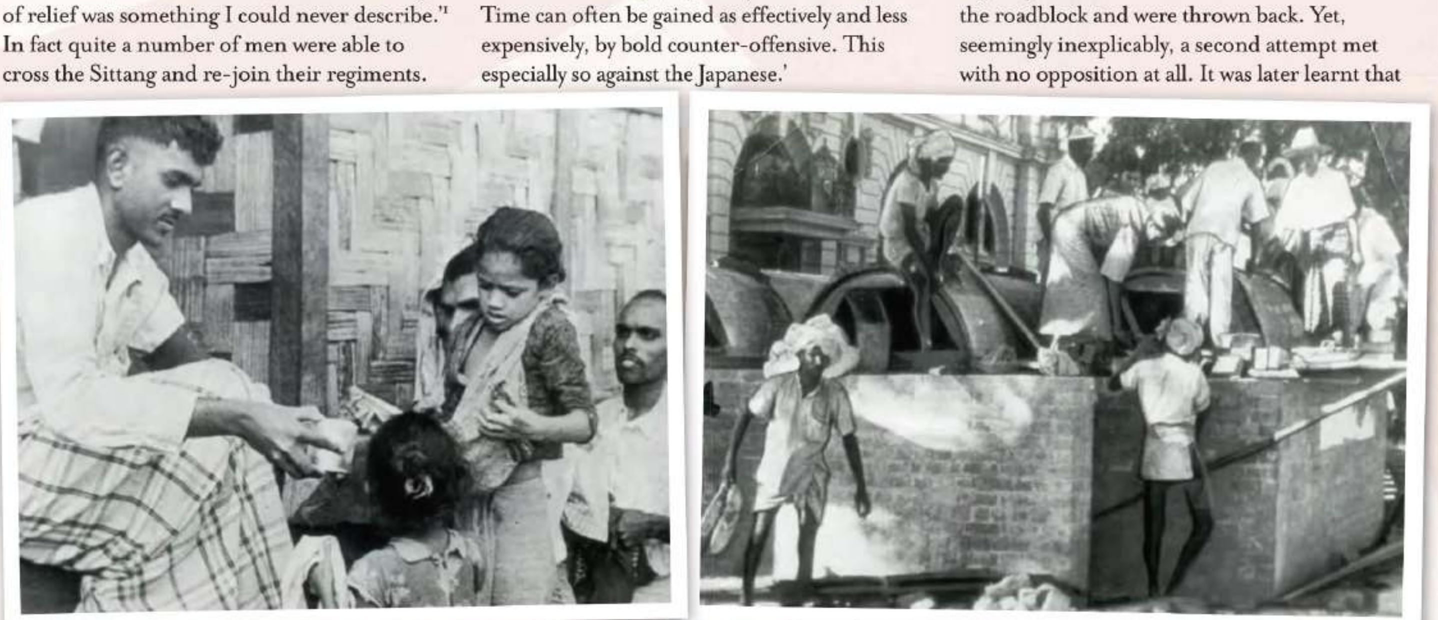
RETREAT

Though reinforcements, in the form of the British 7th Armoured Brigade and the 63rd Indian Infantry Brigade, had reached Rangoon after the Sittang Bridge debacle, this was not enough to hold back the Japanese who, by 6 March, had virtually surrounded the city. It was Wavell's and Alexander's intention to withdraw to Prome, on the River Irrawaddy, some 200 miles north of Rangoon.

Rangoon was the main port for supply of goods to the British forces in Burma and its loss meant that the retreating troops were cut off from their supply base. As there was no road from Burma to India, Alexander's force was virtually isolated with no possibility of outside assistance other than from the Chinese in the north, who Alexander hoped to join forces with.

The British drove away from Rangoon with the last lorries carrying the more robust of the wounded. Those who were unlikely to survive the journey were left behind. A medical officer gave those hopeless cases a final injection of morphine before the army pulled out. Four very courageous orderlies volunteered to stay behind to care for the wounded, placing their lives in the hands of the Japanese. The M3 Stuart tanks of the 7th Armoured Brigade lined the road as protection for the departing convoy as the enemy was rapidly approaching Rangoon.

In fact, the Japanese could easily have trapped the retreating British. Colonel Takanobu Sakuma, with the Japanese 214th Regiment, had already blocked the main highway to Prome. Alexander's men attacked the roadblock and were thrown back. Yet, seemingly inexplicably, a second attempt met with no opposition at all. It was later learnt that

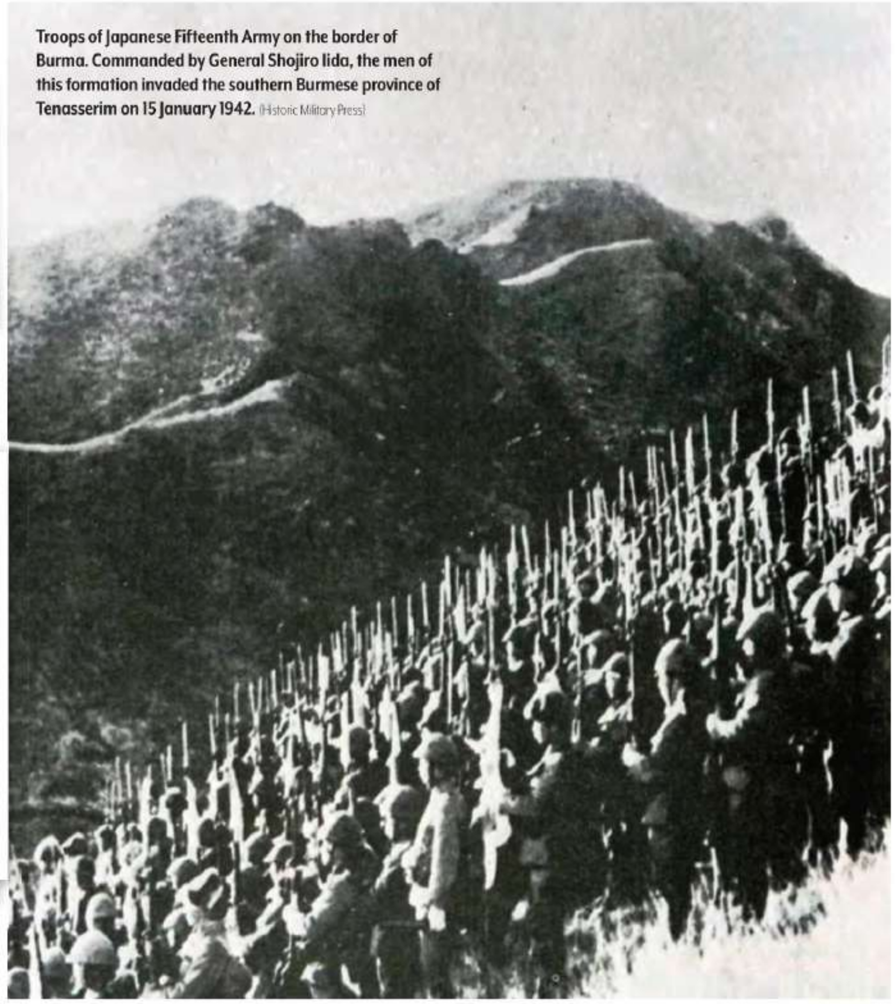


Residents of Rangoon, who fled the city in the face of Japanese bombing, 'rest on a roadside' during January 1942. Rangoon finally fell to Japanese troops on 31 January 1942. On the right, an air raid shelter is seen under construction in Rangoon during December 1941 or early January 1942.. (Historic Military Press)

Rangoon must not burn.
Join the A. F. S.

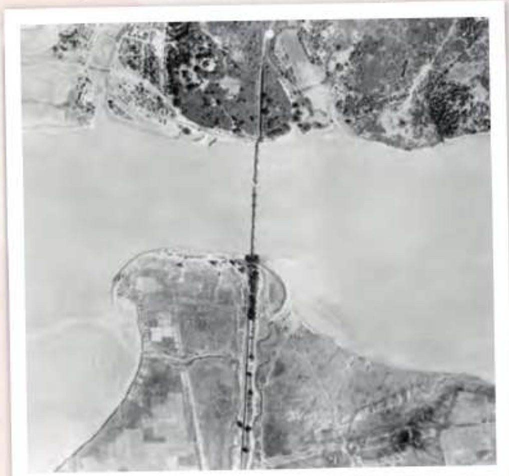
A poster in Rangoon that urged residents to enlist in the Auxiliary Fire Service. Despite the response to such appeals, the civil defence systems suffered badly when many of Rangoon's civilians fled the city in the face of the Japanese bombing. (Historic Military Press)

It was not only Rangoon that suffered aerial attack. The original caption to this image states that 'there was no military objective in this happy Burmese village. The object of the savage Japanese bombing was to create panic and drive the native population on to the roads and into the jungle.' (Library of Congress)



Troops of Japanese Fifteenth Army on the border of Burma. Commanded by General Shojiro Iida, the men of this formation invaded the southern Burmese province of Tenasserim on 15 January 1942. (Historic Military Press)

Sakuma's commanding officer, Sakurai, did not expect the British to retreat northwards. He thought that Alexander would mount a strong defence of Rangoon and then withdraw to the west. Sakurai, therefore, ordered the 214th Regiment to join the main body of the 33rd Division – and the British were allowed to escape. This was possibly the first bit of good luck the British had had since the start of the campaign. Had the roadblock remained in place, the British column, strung out for 40 miles on a single road, would have been annihilated. As it was, the route north to Prome was nothing more than a narrow tarmac road which severely restricted the speed of the British withdrawal. Worse terrain, much worse, would later follow.



An aerial reconnaissance photograph of the bridge over the Sittang River, known as the Sittang Bridge, which was destroyed in the face of the advancing Japanese on 23 February 1942. (Historic Military Press)

Alexander's luck, however, held a little longer. The Japanese had advanced so rapidly that they had outstripped their supplies and their operations ground to a temporary halt. This allowed Alexander the chance to establish positions along the Irrawaddy while the Chinese 6th and 66th armies (the equivalent of two British divisions) held a front to the south of Mandalay.

Every movement by the British, though, was hampered by the flood of refugees in their hundreds of thousands. To add to the chaos this caused, numbers of Burmese soldiers deserted to join the ranks of the Burma Independence Army which had joined the Japanese invasion, hoping to drive the colonialists from their country. The Burmese independence movement – the Freedom Bloc – had been increasingly active since the start of the war and the British troops could not rely on cooperation from the natives. It was not only the civilians who turned their backs on the British; the men of the Burma Frontier Force deserted in large numbers.

As well as losing Burmese support, the Chinese leader, Chiang Kai-shek, withdrew three of his armies after being attacked by the Japanese on 29 March. The Japanese also bombed Mandalay into virtual oblivion, with thousands of civilians killed. 'Every house was burned down or still flaming and smouldering,' wrote American reporter Clare Boothe Luce. 'A terrible stink arose from 2,000 bodies in the ruins of brick, plaster and twisted tin roofing. Only the smoke-grimed stone temple elephants on the scarred path were watching guard over the Road to Mandalay, while buzzards and carrion crows wheeled overhead. Bodies were lying on the streets and bobbing like rotten apples in the quiet green moat around the untouched fort.'[3]

The Japanese started a major attack against the British near Prome on 1 April. The following day, the Japanese commander, General Iida, established his headquarters at Toungoo, deep in the heart of Burma.

Fierce fighting held up the Japanese, but it could not alter the final outcome. The other major Chinese contingent, the Chinese Expeditionary Force, which achieved a notable success against the Japanese at Hopong-Taunggyion south of Mandalay, also abandoned Burma and headed back into western China.

On 26 April, General Alexander took the decision to withdraw all his men to India. One of the great territories of the British Empire was about to be given up. Along with Hong Kong and Singapore, it seemed that British influence in the Far East, which had been nurtured for generations, was about to be swept away in a matter of just a few weeks.

Japanese horse transport passing through a Burmese village during their advance. (Historic Military Press)

TO THE BORDER

The retreating troops faced three great threats. The first was that the Japanese might cut them off and push a strong force between them and India. The second was that their food supplies could run out. The third concern was the monsoon. 'This was the worse danger of all,' wrote Lieutenant General Bill Slim who had been placed in command of Burma Corps consisting of the 17th Indian Infantry Division and 1st Burma Division. 'If it came while we were still struggling hundreds of miles from safety, the track would turn to the most glutinous mud, vehicles would be bogged [down], and all movement practically impossible. Immobilized, we should be in imminent danger of starving. Even a heavy shower or two might have disastrous consequences. The odds were we might escape either the Japanese, the failure of our supplies, or the monsoon, but our chances of avoiding all three were slender.'[4]

As Wavell put it, 'operations were now a race with the weather as with the Japanese and as much a fight against nature as against the enemy'. The men faced a 130-mile trek through the most difficult of conditions along dusty paths that were destined to become quagmires when the rains came.

The conditions were such that the cohesion of many units fell apart. 'There were parties of troops that marched out in formed bodies under officers,' wrote Colonel E.C.V. Foucar, 'Chins [one of the major ethnic nationalities in Burma] of the Frontier Force were particularly good in this respect. They retained their discipline to the last. On the other hand many, and particularly Indians, largely Burma Frontier Force personnel, were only too ready to shoulder aside civilians in their anxiety to reach safety. Stores and villages were looted, and refugees robbed, and the threat of arms was freely employed.'

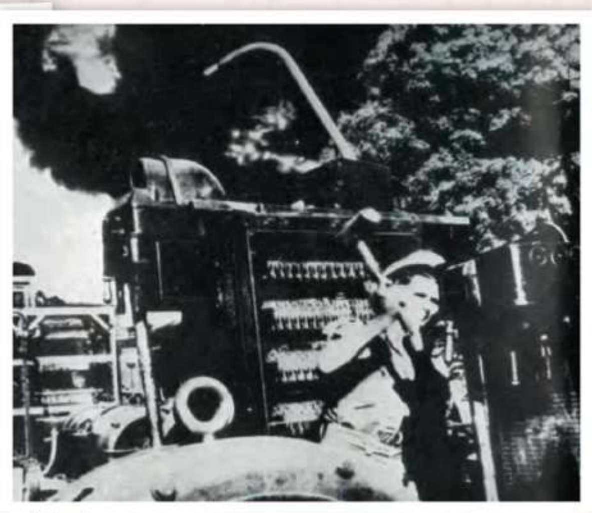
This, of course, led to reprisals and sometimes soldiers would simply disappear overnight, no doubt murdered. It was easy for men to go missing in such circumstances as no one would spend time or effort searching for them. The Burmese also took advantage of the helplessness of the Indian and Anglo-India refugees, murdering and robbing them.

Equally, the Japanese showed no mercy to Indian soldiers who fell into their hands. They were rounded up, their hands tied and placed in bamboo huts, which were doused in gasoline and then set on fire. It is said that some British officers who were captured, were stripped, tied to trees and used for bayonet practice.[5]

'I'D RATHER DIE, THAN MARCH ANY MORE'

Wavell described the road between Ye-U and Kalewa in his official report: 'This road was nothing more than a sandy track ... which caused the abandonment of the major portion of the Motor Transport and all tanks. The track from Ye-U passed through innumerable chaungs or nullahs [a riverbed or ravine] some of which were dry and sandy and some of which were wet ... there was a difficult hill section with many rickety bridges constructed only of brushwood or bamboo. Anyone seeing this track for the first time would find it difficult to imagine how a fully mechanised force could possibly move over it.'[6]

Fires burn late into the night as the British scorched earth policy is enacted at Yenanguang on or about 16 April 1942. The destruction wrought on the oil fields there during the retreat were so successful that according to one source it was at least a year before the Japanese were able to extract oil. (Historic Military Press)



A British soldier uses a sledgehammer 'against vital electrical equipment in a plant which furnished power to run 85 per cent of the oil fields in Burma. Smoke from burning oil rises in the background as [the] British carried out a "scorched earth" policy as the Japanese forced them back.' This picture was taken in Yenanguang oil field, the fighting for which lasted from 11 to 19 April 1942. (Historic Military Press)

British troops and native labourers prepare a road-block near the Burmese border with India in the face of the Japanese advance. (Historic Military Press)

A Japanese tank column crossing a river by means of a hastily constructed bridge built to replace one demolished by retreating British troops. (Historic Military Press)

The last stage of the march proved the most punishing, with the men ill and exhausted. Apart from wading through rivers and clambering up steep gorges, the men had to deal with poisonous insects and snakes – including King Cobras that could grow up to 18 feet long.

Though for much of the withdrawal the British, Indian and Burmese troops had had to fight the Japanese, often hand-to-hand, the last stage of the retreat was without incident, the only fear being that the enemy might move up the River Chindwin and cut the army off from the Indian border. So difficult was the track the troops had to negotiate, even a small body of Japanese could have fatally delayed the weary force. Thankfully, that last, arduous march was conducted without interference from the enemy.

The fear of being cut off from India, however, meant that there was no rest for the men, and as they trudged on, sleep, and efforts to overcome it, became a serious issue. 'All anyone wanted to do was just to sink down wherever one could and go to sleep,' wrote Lieutenant John Randle of the 7th Battalion, 10th Baluch Regiment. He recalled that one portly staff officer simply sat down and said to Randle: 'I'd rather die, than march any more,' and die he did.[7]

INDIA

On 17 May, all of Alexander's formations had reached Tamu near the border with the eastern Indian state of Manipur, where they came under the command of the British 4th Corps. Bill Slim wrote of that final day of the retreat: 'I watched the rear-guard march into India. All of them, British, Indian and Ghurkha, were gaunt and ragged as scarecrows. Yet, as they trudged behind their surviving officers in groups pitifully small, they still carried their arms and kept their ranks. They might look like scarecrows, but they looked like soldiers too. They did not expect to be treated like heroes, but they did expect to be met as soldiers, who, even if defeated, were by no means disgraced.'

Slim expected his men to be applauded for accomplishing what was, and remains, the longest fighting withdrawal in the 300-year history of the British Army. But there was no fanfare for the malaria- and dysentery-riddled troops as there had been for those that had been rescued from Dunkirk, and the battle for Burma would become regarded as a forgotten war and the men who fought in the steep jungle-clad mountains and the arid plains would become part of what became known as the Forgotten Army.

In the five-and-a-half months of that first Burma campaign, the British suffered 10,036 casualties, of whom 3,670 were killed, out of an original strength of around 25,000. The Burmese Army lost a further 3,400 men killed and wounded. Most of those who survived the retreat were incapacitated over the succeeding months with cholera, smallpox and malaria.

The ones who suffered most of all were the civilian refugees. It was estimated that more than half a million men, women and children – including British, Anglo-Indian and Indian members of the British Civil Government of Burma – escaped to India, but many, possibly 50,000, died on that terrible journey.

Kachin tribesmen in action against the Japanese. The original wartime caption states 'Kachin tribesmen of North Burma aid the Allies in the war against the Japanese. Here Kachins await the Japanese in dense jungle. Equipped with rifles and a machine-gun, Kachin fighters await the approach of Japanese soldiers along a jungle trail. They crouch beside a deep trap which they have dug in the trail and covered with leaves and bamboo.' (Historic Military Press)

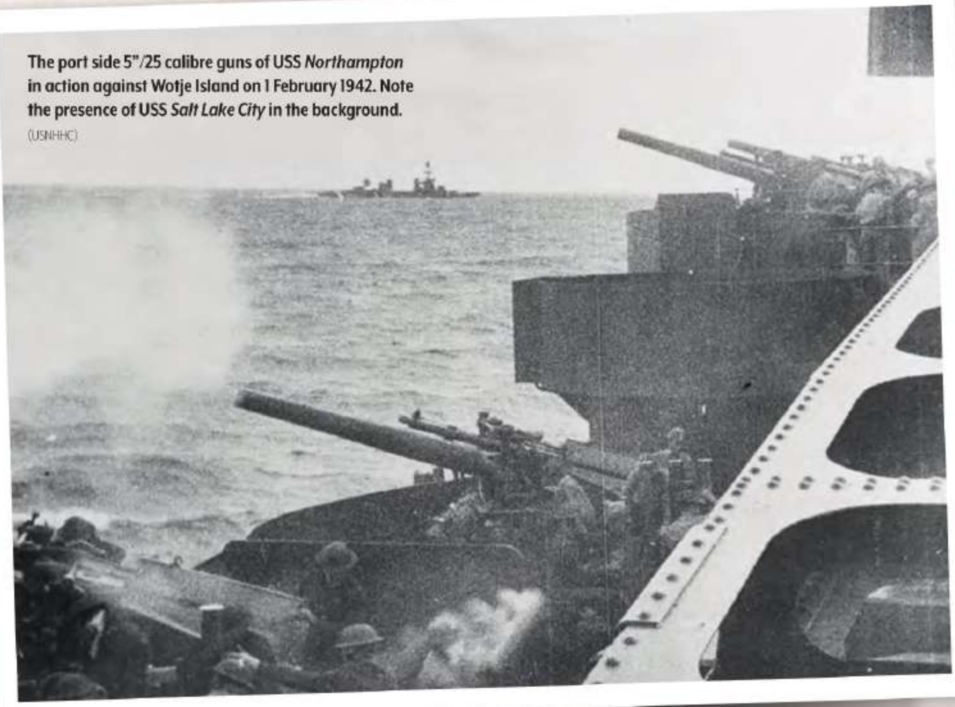
NOTES

1. W. Norman, *The Battle of Sittang 16-23 February 1942*, www.euxton.com/Army-Battle-for-Sittang-16-23-February-1942.htm.
2. Jon Latimer, *Burma: The Forgotten War* (John Murray, London, 2004), p.58.
3. Quoted in Rupert Clarke, *With Alex at War* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2014).
4. Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (Pan, London, 1999), pp.98-9.
5. See Pike, p.286.
6. John Grehan and Martin Mace, *The Fall of Burma 1941-1943* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2015), p.81.
7. John Randle, *Battle Tales From Burma* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2004), p.20.

The first offensive operation by the US Navy's Pacific Fleet took place on 1 February 1942, just eight weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The intervening period had been one of constant success for the Japanese, so the opportunity to take the fight to the enemy was welcomed. The target for this engagement was a series of Japanese possessions in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands.

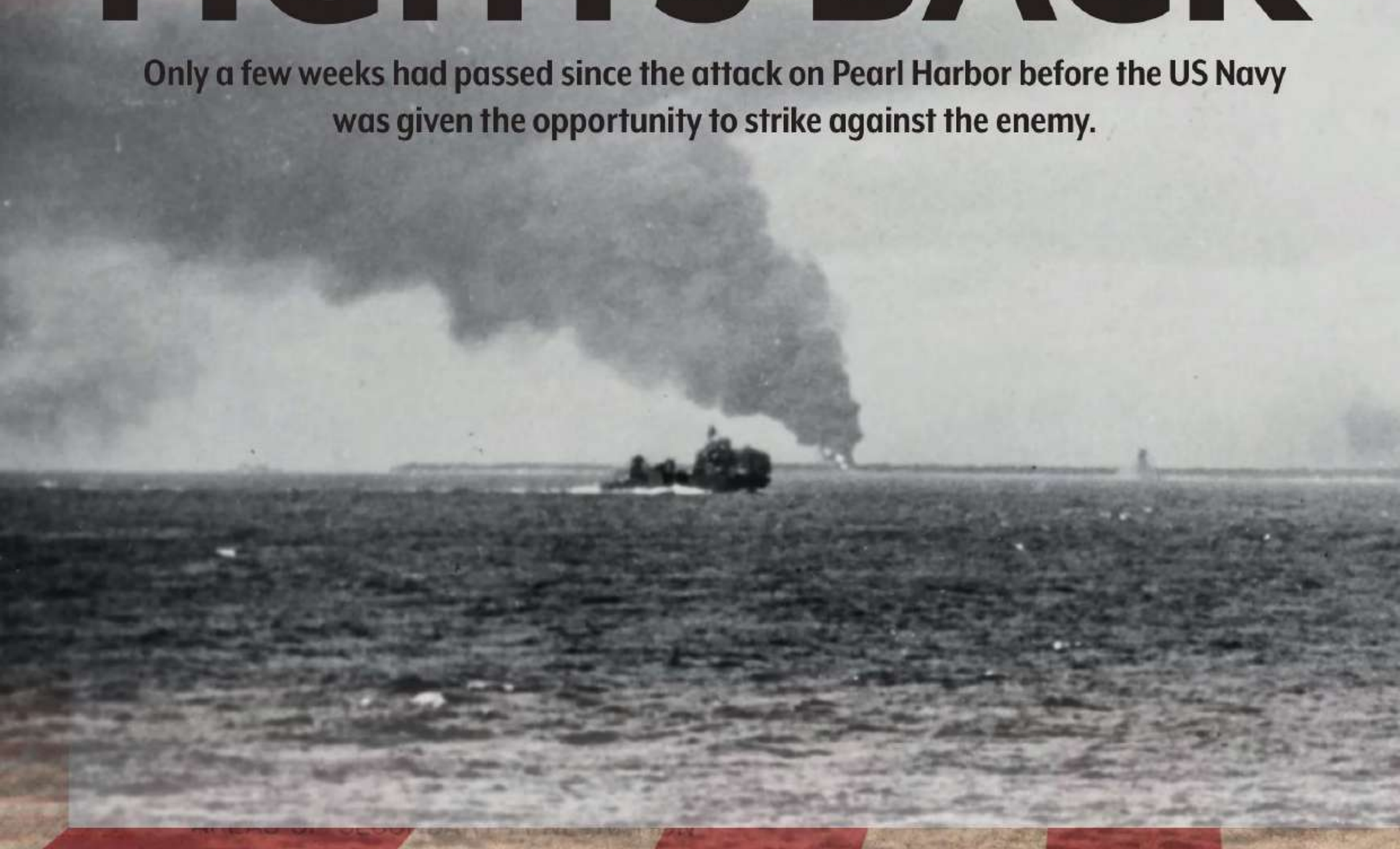
One of the objectives was Wotje Atoll. Originally a German possession, this coral atoll had been granted to Japan after the First World War. One of the largest land masses in the Marshall Islands, albeit just 3.16 square miles in total, the atoll encloses a lagoon of 241 square miles.

The Wotje bombardment group, commanded by Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, comprised the cruiser USS *Northampton* (Captain William D. Chandler, and on which Spruance flew his flag), the cruiser USS *Salt Lake City* (Captain Ellis M. Zachanas), and the destroyer USS *Dunlap* (Lieutenant Commander Virginius R. Roane).


The port side 5"/25 calibre guns of USS *Northampton* in action against Wotje Island on 1 February 1942. Note the presence of USS *Salt Lake City* in the background.
(USNHHC)

THE PACIFIC FLEET FIGHTS BACK

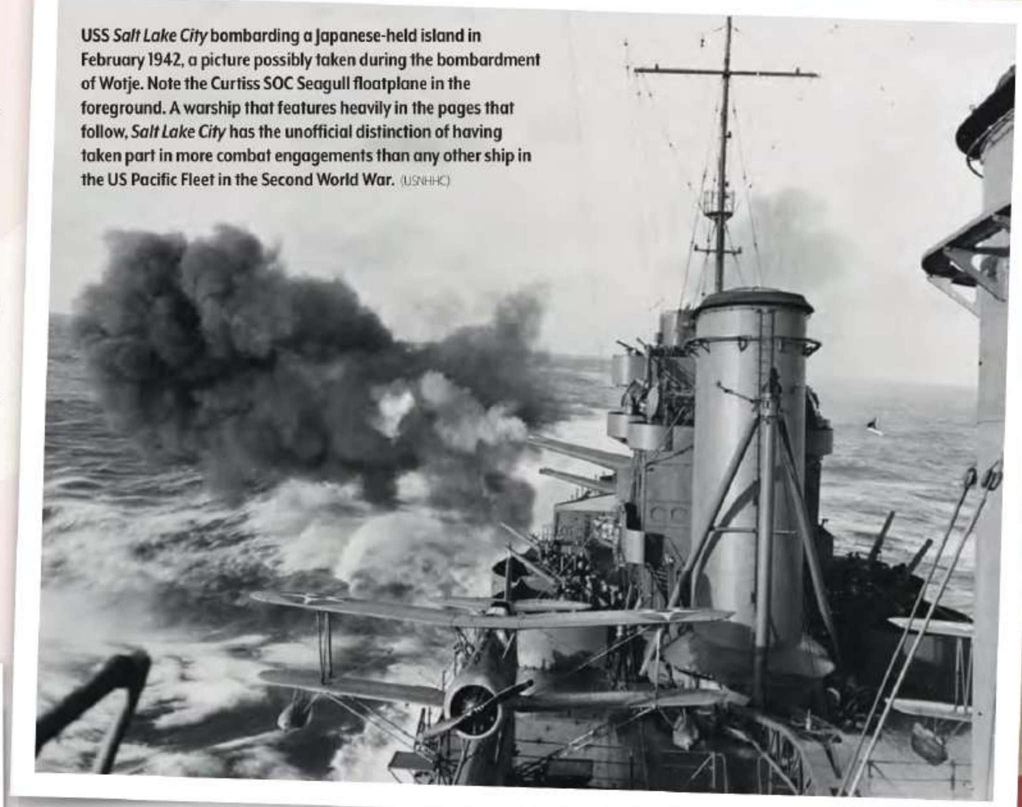
Only a few weeks had passed since the attack on Pearl Harbor before the US Navy was given the opportunity to strike against the enemy.



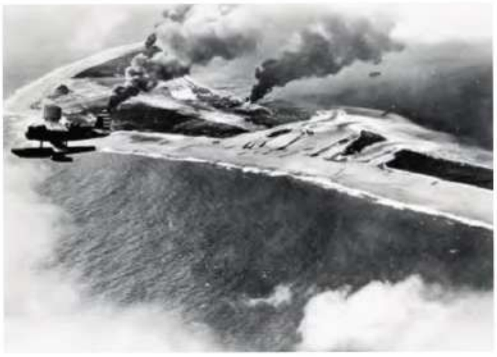
An official post-action account takes up the story: 'At about 0655 the ships of the task group sighted land on the starboard bow … having what appeared to be two radio towers of medium height and various fire control and lookout masts. Upon closer observation one large ship was seen in the lagoon and within a very few minutes the stacks of about five others came into view. Many of the ships were showing black smoke indicating that they were lighting off.'

Both *Northampton* and *Salt Lake City* had already launched their spotter aircraft. The crews of these eventually confirmed that there were in fact eight ships in the lagoon and that they had sighted five artillery batteries on the shore. It was the former that were the targets for the first 55 minutes of the American attack.

It was at 07.13 hours, 13 minutes after sunrise, that the US warships opened fire, *Northampton* doing so by unleashing a full salvo on the enemy. A Japanese patrol vessel that had initially stumbled into the task force, and fired flares to alert the garrison, was sunk by *Dunlap*. At least one of the ships in the lagoon was also sunk. At 08.21 hours, Spruance's task force shifted its fire on to shore targets.



USS *Salt Lake City* bombarding a Japanese-held island in February 1942, a picture possibly taken during the bombardment of Wotje. Note the Curtiss SOC Seagull floatplane in the foreground. A warship that features heavily in the pages that follow, *Salt Lake City* has the unofficial distinction of having taken part in more combat engagements than any other ship in the US Pacific Fleet in the Second World War. (USNHHC)



A US Navy Curtiss SOC Seagull floatplane flies over Wotje Atoll, during the attack on the Japanese airfield there by gunfire from USS *Salt Lake City* and USS *Northampton* on 1 February 1942. The original caption identifies the burning facilities as an ammunition dump and two fuel stores. (USNHHC)

The Japanese defenders had already responded. 'The enemy opened fire at 0721,' noted the official account, 'using guns on one of the ships in the atoll. It was not until 0842, however, that shore batteries began to be effective. At that time shells burst close to the *Salt Lake City*. The ship increased speed and turned away but shells from two guns, probably 5 inchers, burst just astern. At 0848, the *Northampton* was straddled but, although the enemy continued firing for another hour, his efforts were ineffective.'

Spruance gave the order to 'cease firing' at 08.52 hours. The floatplanes were instructed to attack with the two 100lb bombs that each one carried, after which, with the aircraft recovered (except one that was lost in the process), the task group withdrew. Though the attack on Wotje, along with the rest of the series of raids, had little long-term strategic impact, they undoubtedly provided a much-needed boost for American morale.

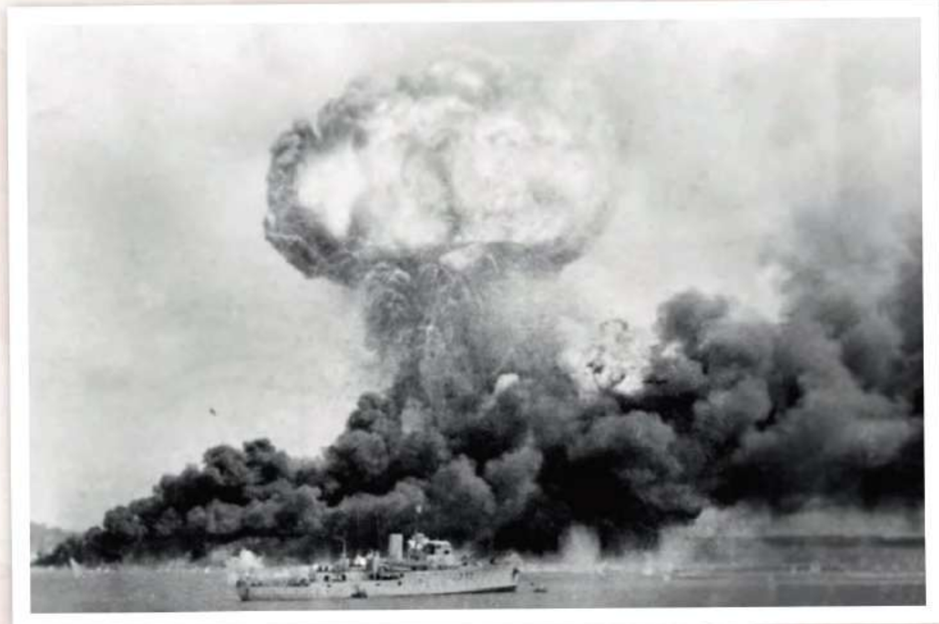
The cruiser USS *Northampton* (on the left) firing against the Japanese base on Wotje, part of the Marshall Islands, early on 1 February 1942. Note the exploding shells in the distance. (USNHHC)

AUSTRALIA'S PEARL HARBOR

As the Japanese successes continued to mount in the Pacific, and more territory fell within the sphere of the Land of the Rising Sun, the threat to Australia became very real.

Located on the Timor Sea on Australia's northern coast, the city of Darwin, the capital of the sparsely populated Northern Territory, or the 'Top End' as it is colloquially known, had long been considered a strategic port and naval base. As war clouds had gathered in the late 1930s, a major military build-up had reverberated through the city and surrounding area. New port and airfield facilities were developed, coastal defence batteries constructed, and the garrison steadily enlarged; by 1942, Darwin's population had more than tripled, and around 7,500 troops were stationed there.

After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, there was a growing concern that an attack on Darwin was increasingly likely, especially as the Emperor's forces continued to extend their reach throughout the southern Pacific region. On the instruction of Prime Minister Robert Menzies' War Cabinet, over 2,000 women and children were evacuated from the area



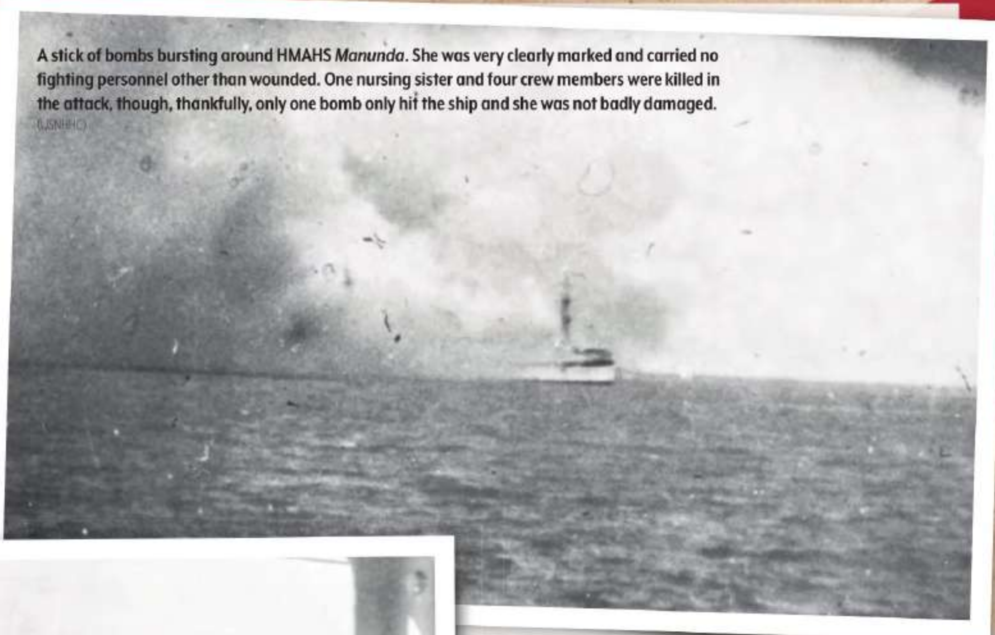
The moment that the cargo ship MV *Neptuna* was hit and exploded, as clouds of smoke from oil storage tanks, during the first Japanese air raid on Australia's mainland. In the foreground is the corvette HMAS *Deloraine*, which escaped damage.

(Australian War Memorial 128108)

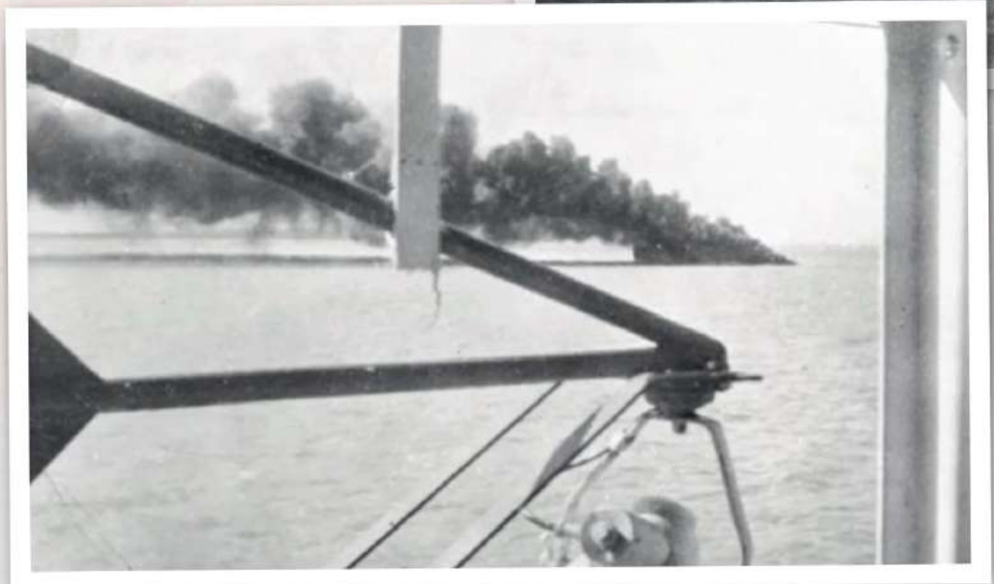
The Darwin Raid underway on 19 February 1942. A pall of smoke hangs over the tanker MV *British Motorist* during the attack on Darwin on 19 February 1942. Shortly after this photograph was taken from the decks of the auxiliary minesweeper HMAS *Tolga*, the latter moved in to rescue survivors from the tanker's crew. *British Motorist* was so badly damaged that she later capsized. (USNHHC) by sea, road and air. The final evacuation aircraft departed Darwin on 18 February 1942. It was the very next day that the Japanese struck.

THE BOMBS RAINED DOWN

The raiders were first sighted in the skies over Darwin at 09.58 hours on that fateful Thursday morning. The initial wave of 188 attacking aircraft was led by none other than Commander Mitsuo Fuchida – the officer who had led the strike against Pearl Harbor a few weeks earlier. Fuchida's force was again drawn from the 1st Carrier Air Fleet, and more specifically aircraft operating from the carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Hiryu* and *Soryu*, all four of which were veterans of Pearl Harbor.



A stick of bombs bursting around HMAHS *Manunda*. She was very clearly marked and carried no fighting personnel other than wounded. One nursing sister and four crew members were killed in the attack, though, thankfully, only one bomb only hit the ship and she was not badly damaged. (USNHHC)

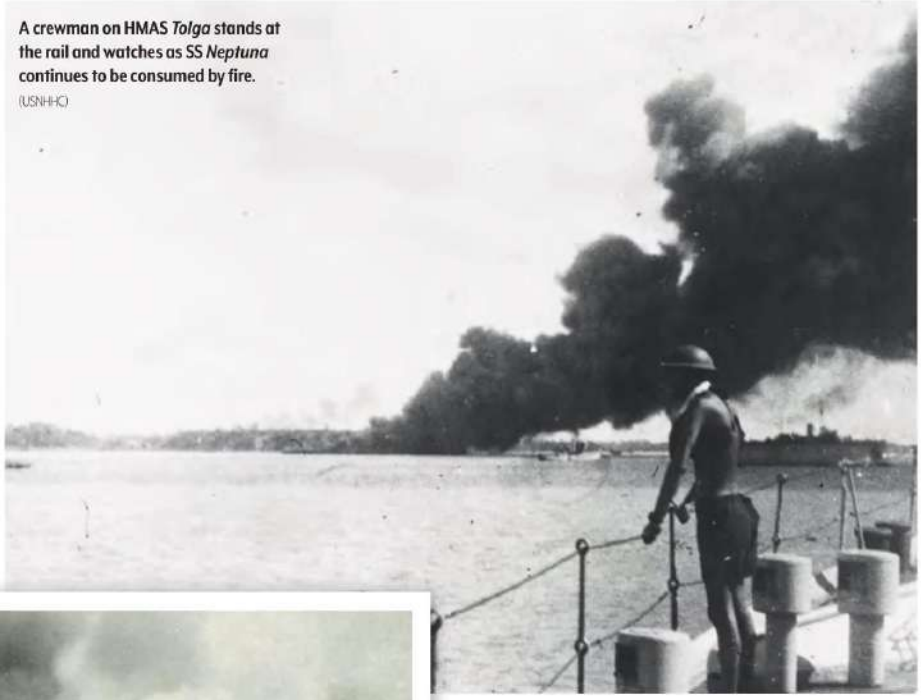


The destroyer USS *Peary* on fire and beginning to drift from where she was moored at the time of the Japanese attack on 19 February 1942. *Peary* was the first ship in the harbour to be singled out by the dive bombers and was not in readiness for an attack – the first bombs struck her aft. Eighty-eight members of the crew lost their lives in the sinking of *Peary*. The picture was taken from the decks of the Australian hospital ship HMAHS *Manunda*.
(Australian War Memorial, 132536)

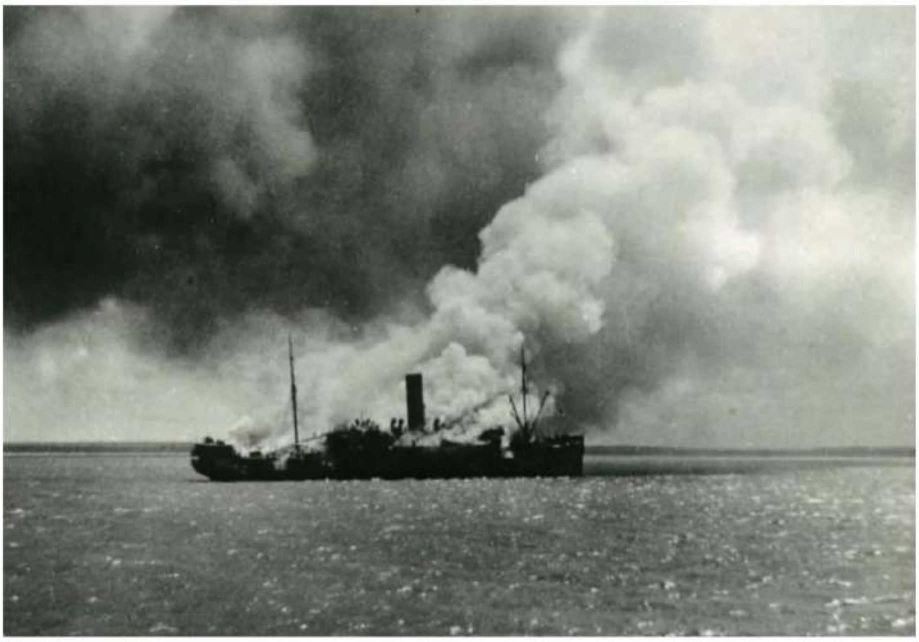
A subsequent Australian report into the events of 19 February 1942, outlined what followed: 'A number of high altitude bombers came in from the south-east of the town, flying in a "V" formation and at a height which was variously estimated by witnesses but was probably not less than 15,000 feet … The bombing was that which is known as pattern bombing in which the individual machines drop their bombs at a signal from the Squadron Leader.

'The first bombs fell over the harbour. Having completed their run this group of bombers after a circuit returned and dropped bombs again in pattern over the town … After the high-altitude bombers there came a number of dive bombers escorted by fighters, and these attacked the shipping in the harbour … An attack was also made about the same time by enemy machines on the Royal Australian Air Force aerodrome and on the civil aerodrome, and by machine-gun fire on the hospital at Berrima some 9 miles from the town.'[1]

Two hours after Fuchida's attack, a wave of 54 land-based bombers added to the destruction wrought on Darwin. This force comprised 27 Mitsubishi G3M Type 96 bombers, flying from Ambon in the Maluku Islands in Indonesia, and 27 Mitsubishi G4M bombers which were operating from Kendari in the Celebes. According to some sources, the two waves of attackers dropped twice as many bombs on Darwin as they had done at Pearl Harbor.



A crewman on HMAS *Tolga* stands at the rail and watches as SS *Neptuna* continues to be consumed by fire.
(USNHHC)

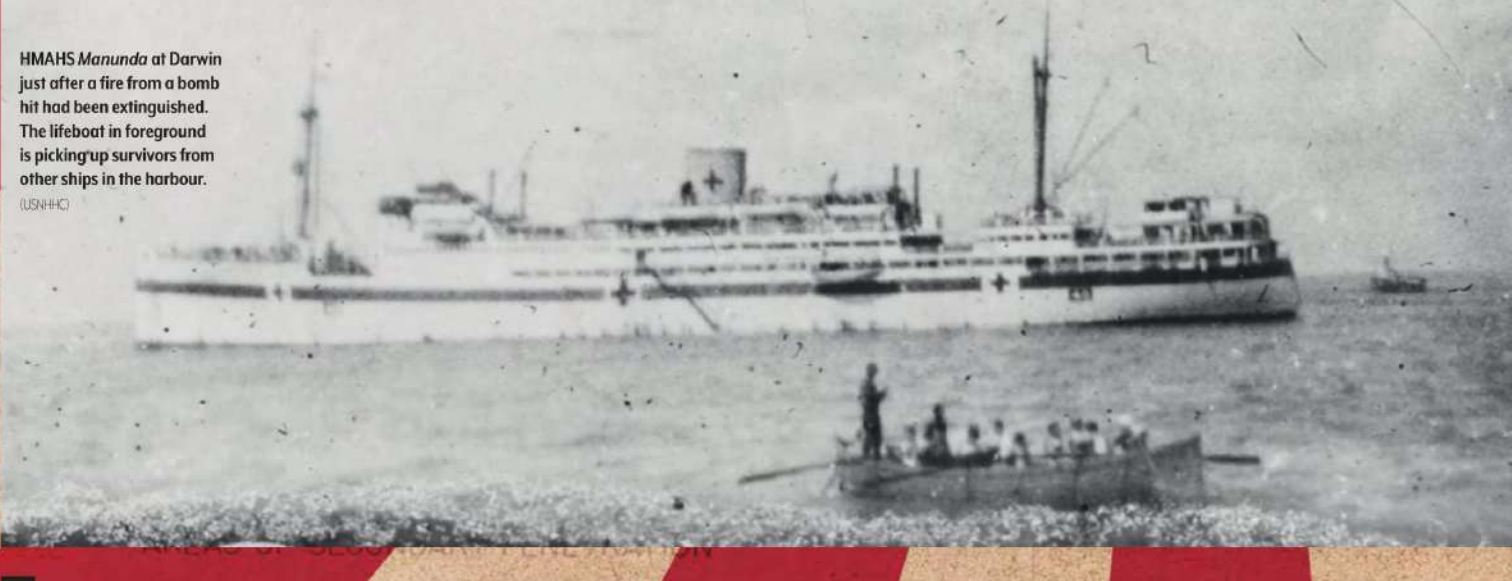


SS *Zealandia* on fire shortly after being hit, 19 February 1942. She subsequently sank at her moorings.
(Northern Territory Library, Alyson M. Wheeler Collection, PH0410/0005)

'ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE'

One of the many witnesses to the Japanese attack on 19 February 1942 was Leading Aircraftman Stanley Hawker. A member of groundcrew for No.2 Squadron RAAF, he was on duty at the military airfield at Darwin when the raid began: 'I was loading 250 pound bombs with five of my mates when we sighted aircraft approaching Darwin harbour at high altitude. At first we thought they were American bombers, but one of my mates had been in the islands … and he identified them as Japanese "Betty" bombers.

"Then all hell broke loose. The Japanese bombed the ships in the harbour, and scored many direct hits."



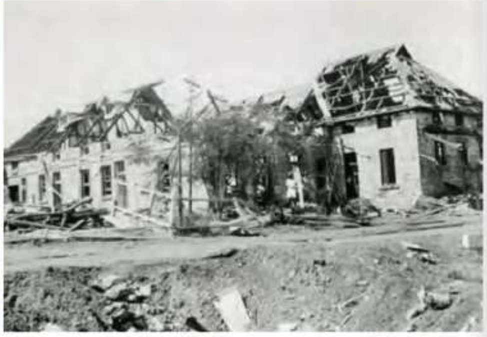
HMAHS *Manunda* at Darwin just after a fire from a bomb hit had been extinguished. The lifeboat in foreground is picking up survivors from other ships in the harbour.
(USNHHC)

'Then all hell broke loose. The Japanese bombed the ships in the harbour, and scored many direct hits. A bomb hit the post office and killed all in the building. They bombed the hospital and the hospital ship *Manunda*. They hit the oil tanks and set them ablaze.

'We had Zero fighters flying low over our heads, and we jumped the security fence and took shelter up to our necks in the mangrove swamp until someone said, "What about the 'crocs'?". So, we left the water and returned to the main RAAF 'drome. It was a shambles … Aircraft were burning, the hangars were completely destroyed, and both runways were damaged. We then made our way to the civil aerodrome, and found that the area had been shafted, and the ammo dump was burning. At this stage another wave of bombers pattern-bombed us, and I took shelter in a machine gun pit. It was pretty scary.[2]

In the harbour, six large vessels were sunk and another 14 ships were damaged. The MV *Neptuna* exploded at a wharf causing extensive damage. The greatest loss of life occurred when the destroyer USS *Peary* sank, taking with it 88 members of its crew. On shore, the destruction was equally wide-spread; in total, some 250 people were killed.

Smoke billows from a blazing fire in one of the shops on Cavanagh Street, Darwin, in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese air raid on 19 February 1942. (Australian War Memorial; P02759.007)



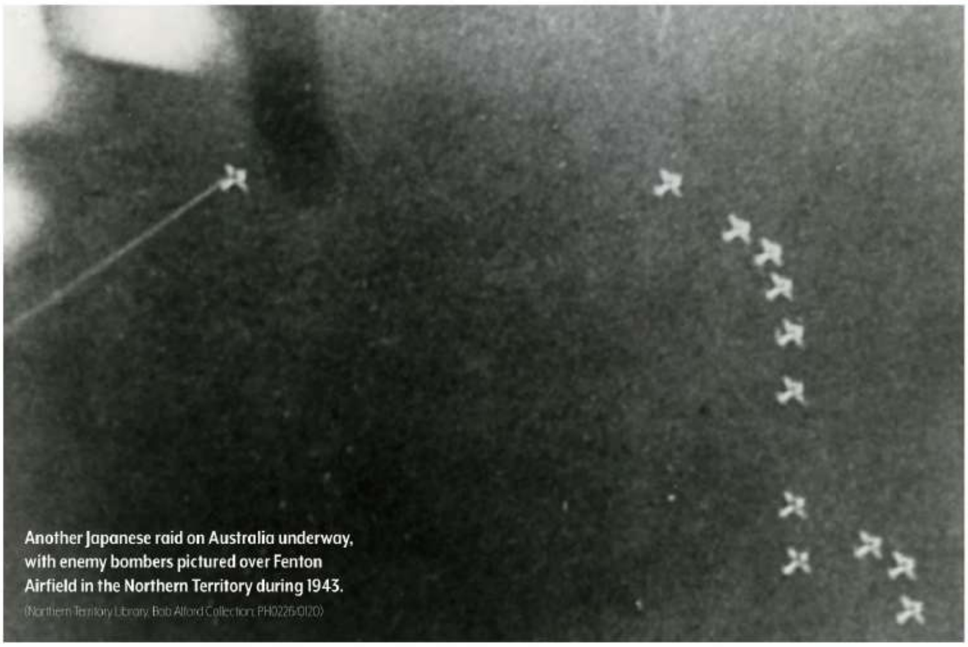
The main Post Office in Darwin after being bombed on 19 February 1942. As the first raid began, staff ran to a trench constructed at the rear of the building. Tragically, this shelter received a direct hit, the blast killing all ten employees who had sought refuge there. (Northern Territory Library, Don Clegg Collection; PH0328/0023)

The Japanese lost four aircraft in the first raid – two of the dive bombers and a pair of escorting fighters. One of the latter crash-landed on Melville Island, north of Darwin. Its pilot, Sergeant Hajime Toyoshima from the carrier *Hiryu*, became the first prisoner of war taken on Australian soil.

FURTHER RAIDS

The attack on Darwin was the first of many that were made against Australia in the weeks and months that followed. As the Australian War Memorial notes, 'two weeks after the attack on Darwin, Broome suffered Australia's second worst air raid on 3 March when 70 people were killed and 24 aircraft, including 16 flying boats, were destroyed. Simultaneous to the raid on Broome, eight Japanese fighters hit Wyndham. Broome was again hit on 20 March, the same day that Derby suffered its only raid. Horn Island was hit on 14 March and additional raids against Horn Island met no air resistance but ceased in August 1942.

'In late July 1942, three raids were made against Townsville which was by then the most important air base in Australia. Three Kawanishi flying boats dropped bombs on the harbour on the night of 25–26 July and lone flying boats returned on the nights of 27–28 and 28–29 July. A final raid took place on the Australian east coast on the night of 30 July when a single bomb was dropped near a house at Cairns.'[3]



Another Japanese raid on Australia underway, with enemy bombers pictured over Fenton Airfield in the Northern Territory during 1943. (Northern Territory Library, Bob Alford Collection; PH0226/0120)

A crashed USAAF Curtiss P-40E of the 33rd Pursuit Group (Provisional) which was based at Darwin. It was one of nine P-40s shot down during the Japanese attack on 19 February 1942. (Australian War Memorial; 044606)

Darwin and its surrounding area would be bombed on 64 occasions during the war, the last being on 12 November 1943. All told, the Japanese carried out 97 air attacks on northern Australia, and enemy air reconnaissance over the region continued through much of 1944.

NOTES

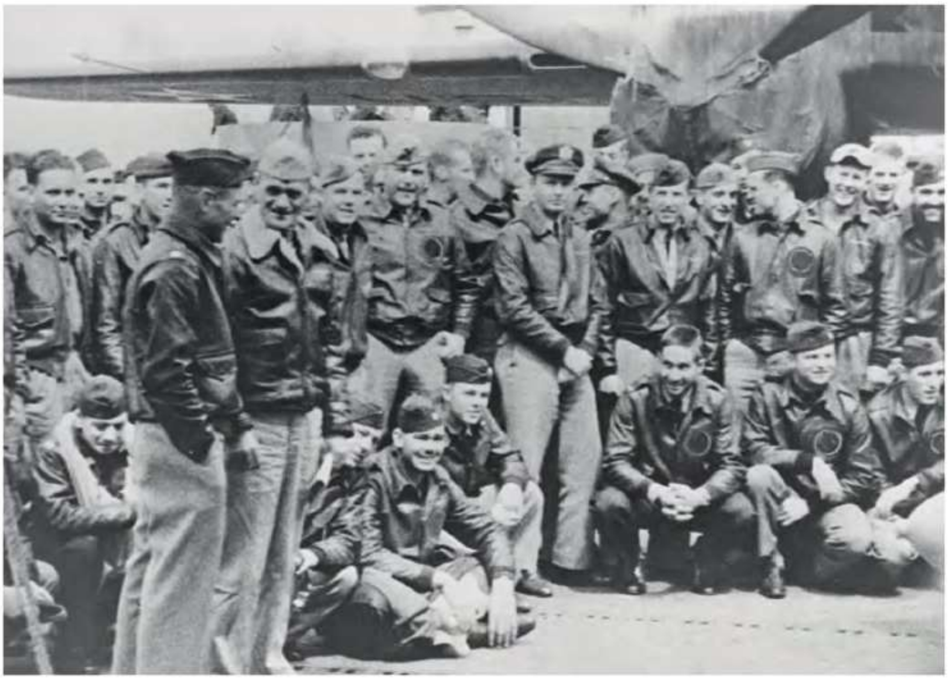
1. Mr Justice Lowe, *Commission of Inquiry Concerning the Circumstances Connected with the Attack Made by Japanese Aircraft at Darwin on 19th February, 1942* (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1945).
2. Quoted on: www.pacificwar.org.au.
3. See: www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/air_raids.

STRIKING BACK

At the darkest time of the war, with Allied morale at its lowest ebb and the Japanese still advancing westwards, President Roosevelt called for an forceful response – with an attack on Tokyo.

The idea that America could strike a retaliatory blow against Japan in the spring of 1942 seemed far-fetched. The Japanese Imperial capital is more than 5,000 miles from the mainland United States, well beyond the range of any land-based aircraft. There appeared to be little hope of mounting a raid upon Japan at any time in the near future. Yet already, in the utmost secrecy, just such an assault was being carefully planned.

On 10 February 1942, Captain Francis Low, the US Navy's Assistant Chief of Staff for anti-submarine warfare, suggested that large aircraft could be launched from carriers to strike at Japan. The normal naval carrier-borne aircraft lacked both the range and bomb-carrying capacity to achieve this, but Low believed that the USAAF's twin-engine B-25B Mitchell bombers could be launched from an aircraft carrier. The range of the Mitchell with a full bomb-load, however, was just 1,300 miles. Yet, if the aircraft were stripped of all of their non-essential equipment, including much of its defensive



Taken on 16 April 1942, whilst USS *Hornet* was at sea en route to the B-25s' launch point, in this photograph Doolittle (left front with his hands in his pockets) can be seen in discussion with the carrier's commanding officer, Captain Marc A. Mitscher. (USNHHC)

armament, and its bomb-load reduced, the B-25's range could be considerably increased. Maybe, just maybe, one of the most audacious and ambitious air raids in history was possible.

Captain Lowe presented his idea to Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the United States Fleet, who immediately seized upon the scheme – as did the Chief of the Army Air Forces, General Henry 'Hap' Arnold. The proposal that developed was to sail an aircraft carrier to within 400 or 500 miles of the coast of Japan and then launch the B-25s. The targets were to be military and industrial facilities in the Tokyo-Yokohama, Nagoya and Osaka-Kobi areas. Though the original hope was that the bombers would return to the carriers, the distances involved made this an impossibility, and so they were to fly on with the intention of reaching those regions of China not under direct Japanese control. From there the airmen would, hopefully, be repatriated.

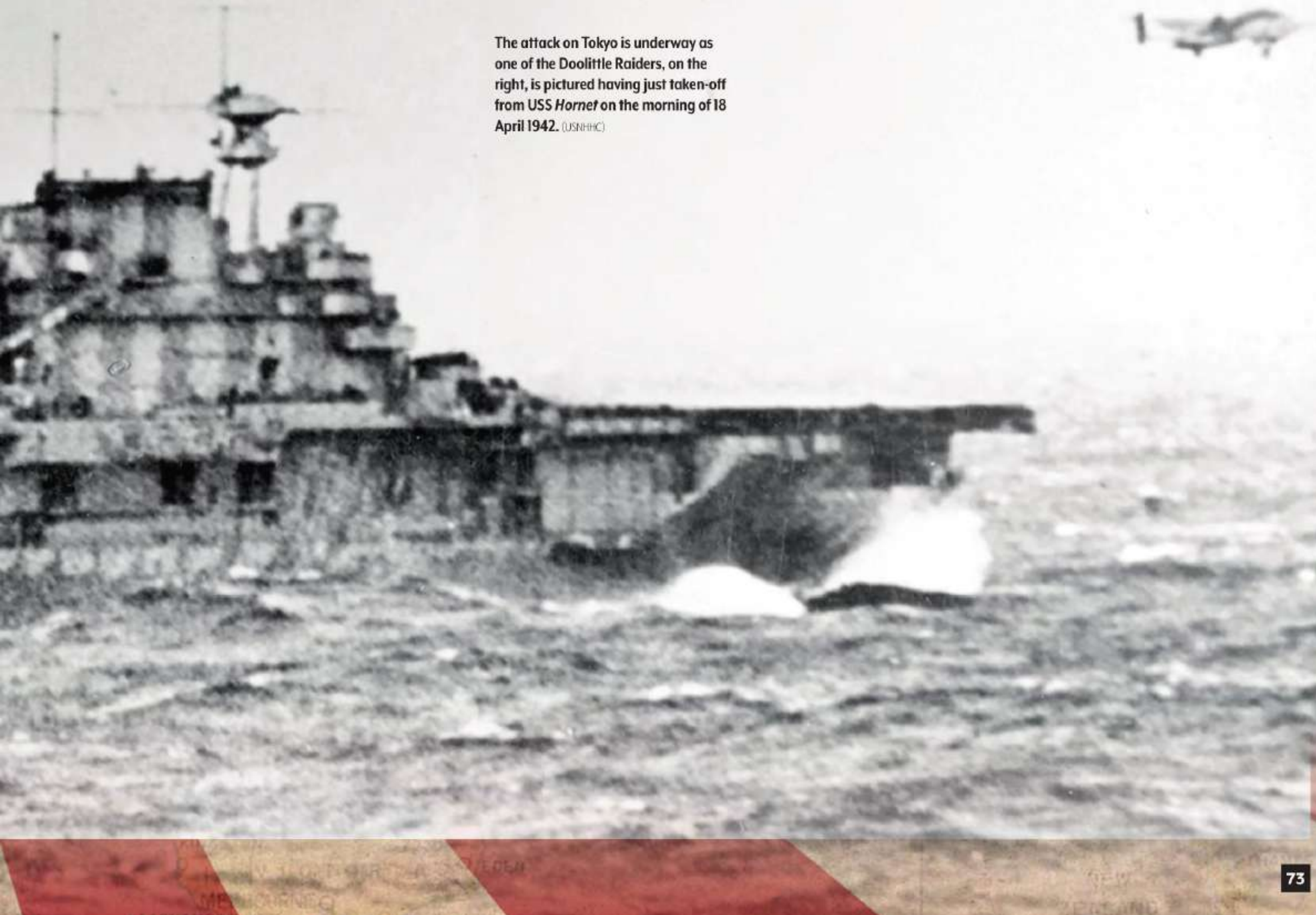
LIEUTENANT COLONEL 'JIMMY' DOOLITTLE

The man selected to lead the operation was Lieutenant Colonel James H. 'Jimmy' Doolittle. 'The object of the project,' he later wrote in a report, 'was to bomb the industrial centres of Japan. It was hoped that the damage done would be both material and psychological. Material damage was to be the destruction of specific targets with ensuing confusion and retardation of production. The psychological results, it was hoped, would be the recalling of combat equipment from other theaters for home defense, thus effecting relief in those theaters, the development of a fear complex in Japan, improved relationships with our allies and a favorable reaction on the American people.'

There were, though, immense obstacles to overcome – principally the dominating presence across the Pacific of the hitherto victorious Japanese fleet and the immense distances involved. For the B-25s to stand any chance of reaching Tokyo, extensive modifications were required. Additional fuel tanks would have to be installed and every piece of non-essential equipment removed.

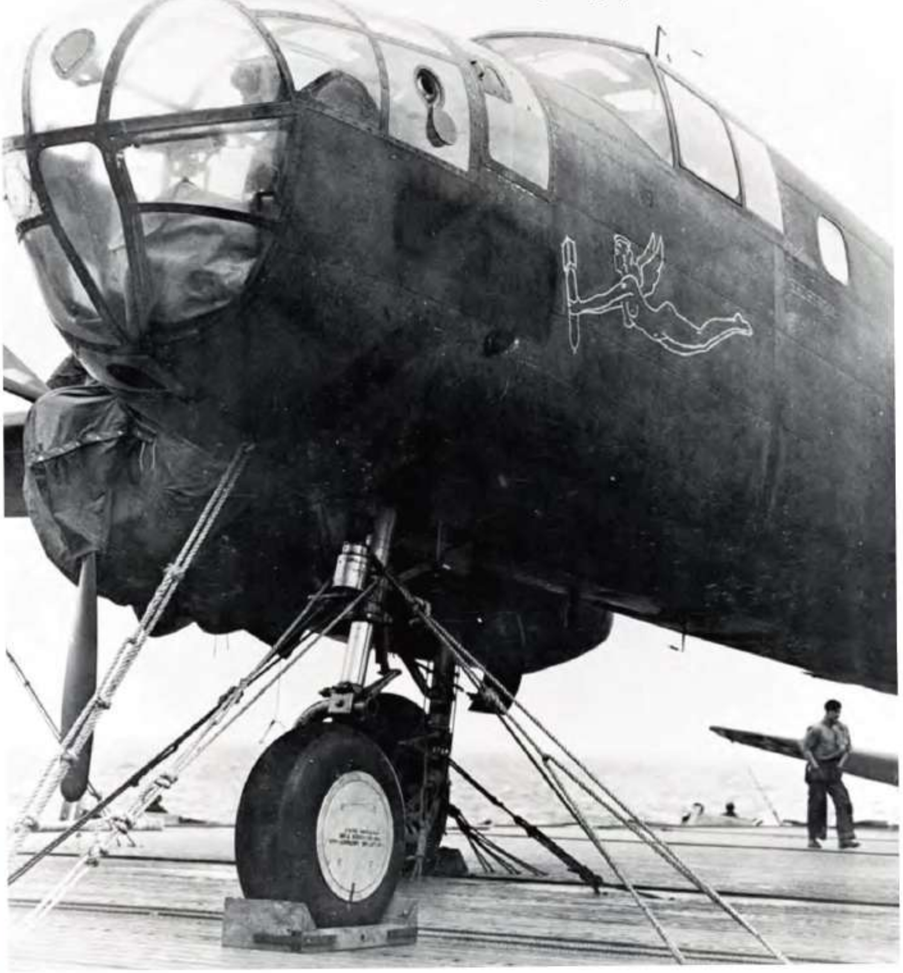
Twenty-four aircraft were prepared in this manner. The crews were drawn from the 17th Bombardment Group, whose commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel W.C. Millis, was told that it was to be a mission that would be extremely hazardous, would require a high degree of skill and would be of great value to the nation's defence effort, but they were not informed of the exact purpose or target. It would be an operation no man could reasonably be ordered to carry out – it was volunteers only. Though they had no real idea what they were being asked to do, more men volunteered from Millis' squadrons than could possibly be employed.

The man who led the raid on Japan, James H. 'Jimmy' Doolittle, pictured following the attack having been promoted to Brigadier General. Doolittle had been promoted by two grades, to Brigadier General, on the day after the Tokyo attack, bypassing the rank of full colonel. (NARA)



The attack on Tokyo is underway as one of the Doolittle Raiders, on the right, is pictured having just taken-off from USS *Hornet* on the morning of 18 April 1942. (USNHHC)

On 16 April, whilst *Hornet* was en route to the launching point, a ceremony was held on the carrier's flight deck during which Japanese friendship medals 'were tied to a single 500lb bomb that would be dropped by Ted Lawson's *Ruptured Duck*'. Here, Doolittle poses for the camera whilst attaching one of the medals. (USNHHC)



The nose of one of the raiders' B-25s pictured whilst it is tied down on the flight deck of USS *Hornet*. This aircraft, Mitchell #40-2249, is that of Captain Charles Greening's crew No.11. Nicknamed *Hari Carrier*, it has been given appropriate nose art. (USNHHC)

Boxes of ammunition are prepared for loading onto the B-25s. Note the wooden flight deck planking, with metal aircraft tie-down strips in place of every eighth plank. (USNHHC)

From these men, 24 crews were selected and were ordered to Eglin Field, at Valparaiso in western Florida, for a final course of training. Together with the groundcrew, armourers and so on, these crews proceeded to Eglin Field as rapidly as the airplanes could be converted and made available. The first of them arrived just before 1 March, the rest just after. Having been placed under the command of Jimmy Doolittle, training then began in earnest for what would become the first joint action between the US Navy and the USAAF. More importantly, it would be America's first strike back at the enemy.

TASK FORCE 16

On 31 March and 1 April 1942, 16 B-25Bs were loaded aboard the carrier USS *Hornet* at Naval Air Station Alameda, San Francisco. *Hornet* was to join Task Force 16, which, under the command of Vice Admiral W.F. 'Bull' Halsey, also consisted of the carrier USS *Enterprise*, four cruisers and nine destroyers, all of which were supported by a pair of tankers.

On 13 April, Task Force 16 was assembled and headed out into the vast waters of the Pacific. The plan was that when the task force was 400 miles from Japan the bombers would be launched just before dark, bomb at night and proceed to their final destination, hopefully arriving after dawn in the early morning.

Lacking radar at that stage of the war, the Japanese 'early warning' capability lay in parallel lines of picket boats – radio-equipped converted fishing trawlers – operating at prescribed intervals offshore. Unfortunately, one of these small vessels, No.23 23 *Nittō Maru*, encountered the task force on the morning of 18 April and radioed a sighting report.

Halsey could not endanger any of the few capital ships left in service in the Pacific. The bombers would have to take-off without delay, even though USS *Hornet* was still some 650 nautical miles from Japan, and approximately 825 miles east of the centre of Tokyo. This was almost double the distance it had been expected that the B-25s would have to fly to reach the Japanese capital. The planned 300-mile safety allowance would be swallowed up, and there was no longer any chance of the raiders reaching their proposed landing grounds in China. There was no hesitation among any of the men. They knew that, if they were lucky, they might reach the Chinese mainland, but would be almost certain to fall into the hands of the enemy.

All of the crews were given selected objectives, among which were steel works, oil refineries, oil tank farms, ammunition dumps, dock yards, munitions plants, and aircraft factories. They were also provided with information on secondary targets in case it was impossible to reach the primary ones. The men were told that after delivering the bombs they were to fly as far west as possible, and if they failed to reach land, come down on the water, launch their dinghies and try to sail on. The skipper of each aircraft was also given $500 to use, if necessary, to bribe any willing Chinese to help them reach Chungking or the airbase at Chuchow which was in Chinese-held territory.

TARGET TOKYO

As Zero Hour approached on the morning of Saturday, 18 April 1942, USS *Hornet* swung about and the flight deck personnel prepared to launch the bombers, which had been readied for take-off the previous day. Conditions were not ideal, with a gale of more than 40 knots churning the sea with 30ft crests. Heavy swells, which caused the ship to pitch violently, shipped sea and spray over the bow, and drenched the deck crews.

One of the B-25s lines up for take-off from USS *Hornet* on the morning of 18 April 1942. Note the white lines painted on the flight deck to guide the pilot during his take-off run. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Some of USS *Hornet*'s crew watch from a signal lamp platform as one of the B-25s gets airborne at the start of its journey to the heart of Japan. (NARA)

Despite the conditions, at 08.20 hours Doolittle applied full power and sent his heavily-laden bomber racing down the flight deck. Many of those present watched tensely, momentarily fearing the worst when the bomber suddenly dropped in altitude, only to then rise back up. Having circled the carrier, Doolittle set a course for Japan. The raid was underway.

It was just over an hour before the last of the 16 bombers, Lieutenant William G. Farrow's #40-2268, nicknamed *Bat Out of Hell*, was airborne at 09.19 hours. Upon take-off, each aircraft climbed to the right height and flew over *Hornet* lining the axis of the ship up with the drift sight. The course of the carrier was displayed in large figures from the gun turret abaft the island. This meant that, in the featureless ocean, the navigators were able to get an accurate fix before setting off on their flight across the hundreds of miles of Pacific.

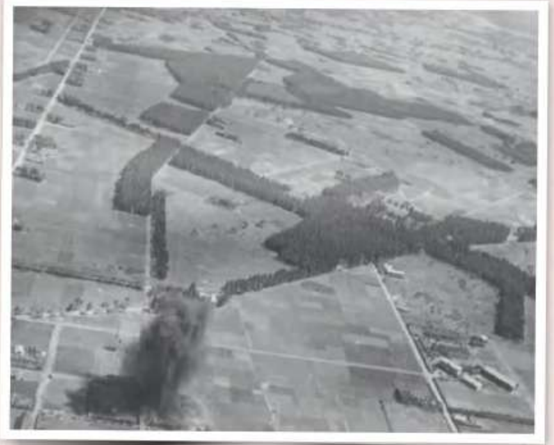
In addition to each B-25 crew having selected targets assigned to it, each flight of three bombers was allocated a specific course and general area to cover. The first flight, led by Lieutenant Hoover, was given the northern part of Tokyo, with the second flight, commanded by Captain Jones, being allocated the central part of Tokyo. The third flight, led by Captain York, had the southern part of Tokyo and the north central part of the Tokyo Bay area, whilst the fourth flight, led by Captain Greening, was to cover the southern part of Kanagawa, the city of Yokohama and the Yokosuka Navy Yard. The final, fifth, flight was directed to head around to the South of Tokyo and proceed to the vicinity of Nagoya. The flights were spread over a 50-mile-wide front in order to provide the greatest possible coverage, to create the impression that there was a larger number of bombers than was actually airborne, and to dilute enemy ground and air fire.

Eight of the Doolittle Raiders' 16 B-25s are visible on flight deck of USS *Hornet*. The aircraft to the right is Lieutenant Richard Joyce's #40-2250. During the two-week-long outward passage, the bombers received regular maintenance and engine testing to ensure they would be ready. (USNHHC)

"The co-pilot then pointed out two more fighters going across our bow."

Having just taken-off from the carrier, one of the B-25s flies over USS *Hornet* whilst setting course for Japan on the morning of 18 April 1942. (USNHHC)

One of the last of the B-25s to get airborne passes over the end of the flight deck as it takes off bound for Japan. (NARA)

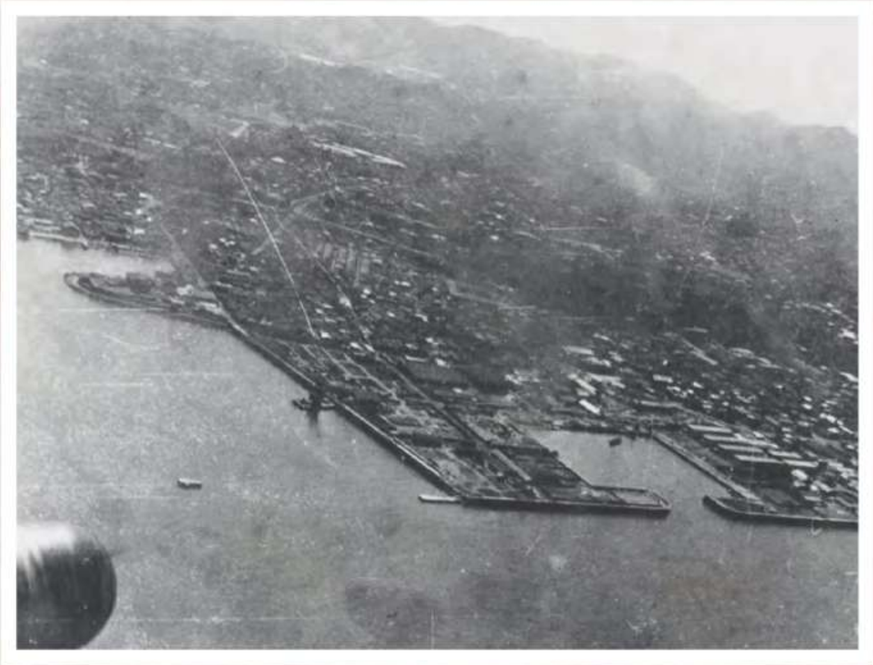


The moment that a bomb dropped by one of B-25s explodes during the raid on 18 April 1942. It is not known which crew was involved. It is stated that 87 were killed and nearly 500 wounded in the attack. (NARA)

Some 30 minutes after leaving the task force, Doolittle's B-25 was joined by that flown by Lieutenant Travis Hoover, who had been the second raider to take-off. Doolittle subsequently penned a report in which he described the events that followed: 'About an hour out, passed a Japanese camouflaged naval surface vessel of about 6,000 tons. Took it to be a light cruiser. About two hours out passed a multi-motored land plane headed directly for our flotilla and flying at about 3,000 ft, 2 miles away. Passed and endeavoured to avoid various civil and naval craft until land fall was made north of Inubo Shuma. Was somewhat north of desired course but decided to take advantage of error and approach from a northerly direction, thus avoiding anticipated strong opposition to the west.

'Many flying fields and the air full of planes north of Tokyo. Mostly small biplanes, apparently primary or basic trainers. Encountered nine fighters in three flights of three. This was about ten miles north of the outskirts of Tokyo proper. All this time had been flying as low as the terrain would permit.

'Continued low flying due south over the outskirts of and toward the east centre of Tokyo. Pulled up to 1,200 ft, changed course to the southwest and incendiary-bombed highly inflammable section. Dropped first bomb at 13:30 (ship time).'



One of Doolittle's B-25s passes over the Yokosuka Naval Base and Naval Arsenal, south of Tokyo and Yokohama, on 18 April 1942. It is believed that this picture was probably taken by a member of Lieutenant Edgar McElroy's crew No.13. (NARA)

Doolittle's crew had made history, undertaking the first American offensive strike against the Japanese mainland. The enemy defences, however, were not found wanting, as Doolittle went to note: 'Anti-aircraft [fire] very active but only one near hit. Lowered away to housetops and slid over western outskirts into low haze and smoke. Turned south and out to sea. Fewer airports on west side but many army posts.

'Passed over small aircraft factory with a dozen or more newly completed planes on the line. No bombs left. Decided not to machine gun for reasons of personal security. Had seen five barrage balloons over east central Tokyo and what appeared to be more in the distance. Passed on out to sea flying low. Was soon joined again by Hoover who followed us to the Chinese coast.'

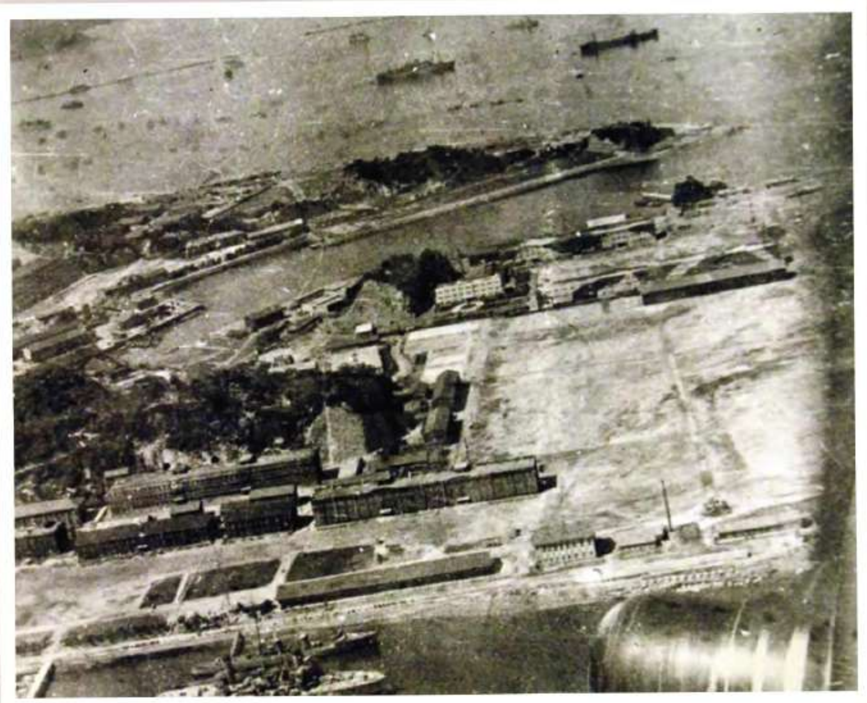
Though Doolittle was unaware of it at the time, Hoover's departure from *Hornet* had been a difficult one. The sea was so rough that water was being taken on over the bow of the carrier, and, as Doolittle later wrote, 'the take-off was made on the upbeat. The airplane was thrown into the air and the pilot pulled back on the stick too abruptly. For a moment it looked as though the plane might fall off on a wing but through good piloting Lieutenant Hoover was able to correct the condition and proceed without further difficulty. This together with the Navy crew member who was struck in the arm by a propeller while assisting in manoeuvring an airplane on the deck, was the only eventuality during take-off.'

From an altitude of just 900 feet, Hoover's crew successfully bombed powder factories and magazines near the river north of the main railroad station and Imperial Palace. It was reported that debris from the explosions 'flew to a height higher than that of the airplane'.

As Doolittle and Hoover flew on westwards, the remaining raiders continued to press home the attack. They did not have it all their own way. Lieutenant Everett W. Holstrom was the pilot of crew No.4, at the controls of B-25B #40-2282. It was as they were approaching Tokyo at just 75ft that things took a dangerous turn. 'I saw two pursuits coming at us,' Holstrom later recalled, 'and I immediately turned under them. One fired and I saw tracer bullets going over the pilots' compartment ...

'The co-pilot then pointed out two more fighters going across our bow at about 1,500 feet and they looked as if they were ready to peel off on us. I told the navigator to tell Corporal Bob Stephens in the nose to try and use his guns. I had given him previous instructions to have the bombardier salvo the bombs if we were intercepted by pursuit, so the bombs were salvoed from about 75 feet.

'By this time we were indicating about 270 mph and I had turned under the two pursuits that had come across our bow and then turned due south. These pursuits all had non-retractable landing gear and I presumed them to be of the "97" type. McCool had come back to his compartment and said that he had seen several pursuits that looked like British Spitfires and by looking back through the navigator's side window I saw one of these planes on our right rear completing a firing pass. It had an in-line engine, retractable gear, and double tapered wings. I had no idea what type this was but supposed it was a Zero with an in-line engine. After running for about ten minutes nobody could see another airplane so I turned and headed down the coast of Japan towards China.'[1] Surprisingly, it seems, the fighters were unable to catch the bomber and the Japanese eventually gave up the chase.



Another view of Yokosuka Naval Base taken by one of the B-25s during the Raid – though which crew was responsible it not known. Note the Japanese naval vessels in the foreground. (NARA)

Lieutenant Richard O. Joyce's crew of the tenth B-25 to take-off had a similar experience. Their B-25 encountered heavy anti-aircraft fire and was attacked by nine Zero-type fighters at 5,000 feet, which Joyce evaded by diving below them, and increasing the speed to 330mph after the bombs had been released. His was the only Mitchell to suffer any major damage over Japan, being hit once, resulting in an 8-inch hole being made in the fuselage just forward of horizontal stabilizer.

THE AFTERMATH

After the raid, the Army Air Forces' Director of Intelligence Service produced an Informational Intelligence Summary which drew the following conclusions: 'Sixteen B-25s made the flight to Japan. From the pilots or crew members of thirteen of these planes have come reports from which a reasonable estimation of the execution and success of the mission may be made. The preparation was thorough. The flight was well executed, and, in most cases, primary targets were reached, hits were made at low altitudes, and explosions, followed by smoke and fires, were observed by several ships [aircraft] as they passed over the area.'

The same report went on to detail part of the enemy's response to the Doolittle Raid: 'The reaction on our Allies and the American public was essentially favorable. Any encouragement, however, accruing to the Chinese must have been tempered by the fact that immediately following the raid the Japanese initiated a severe attack on those areas in China which they suspected had been used in the project.'

What this referred to was that following the raid, the Japanese immediately mounted a

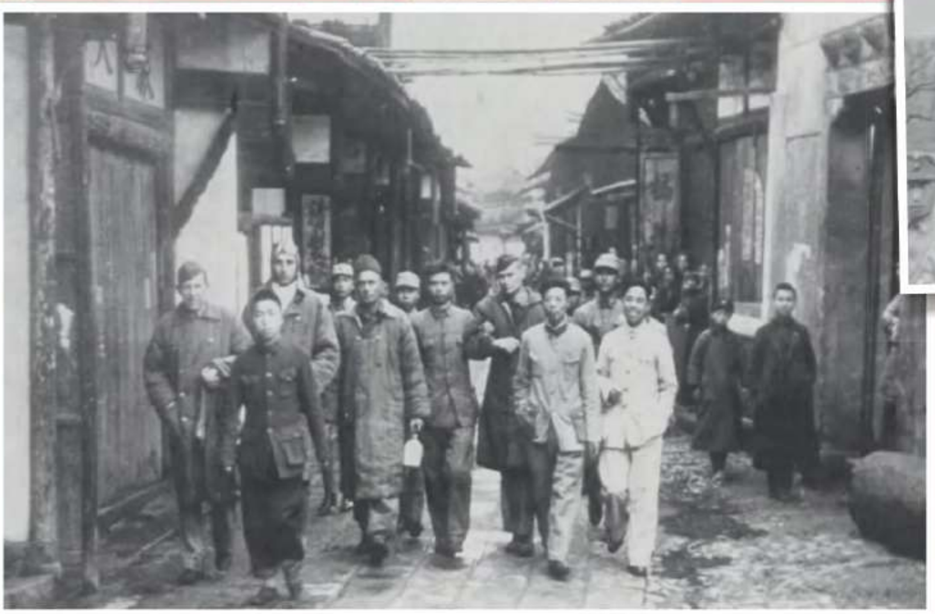
BALING OUT OVER CHINA

For the majority of the Doolittle Raiders, the aerial part of their mission came to an end in the skies over eastern China, where they were forced to abandon their aircraft. Lieutenant Tom Griffin was the navigator in the ninth B-25 to have taken-off, which, nicknamed *Whirling Dervish* by its crew, was flown by Lieutenant Harold Watson. Having seen his Mitchell drop its deadly cargo on the Tokyo Gas and Electric Engineering Company, Griffin later recalled the final moments of the flight:

'As the engines spluttered, the men knew they had to bale out. 'One by one we eased down (the bottom hatch) ... into nothing. Jumping at night and in a storm is an experience one will never forget. There were times during that descent from 10,000 feet when I thought I had missed the earth.

'The wind currents at the time must have been violent because I remember first being able to see my chute. It would be level with me and sort of fold up. Then it would swing up over my head, fill up, and come down on the other side once again spilling its air. However, it hung up on the tops of some bamboo trees, and I was lowered to earth with the greatest of ease ... I unbuckled my harness and moved off, leaving my chute ... above.'

Having bombed Japan and then flown on westwards to China, Doolittle and his crew baled out leaving their B-25 to crash into the ground. Here Doolittle is subsequently pictured resting on the ground by the wing of his B-25, #40-2344, on a Chinese hillside. (NARA)



Chinese soldiers and civilians accompany a group of Raiders whilst evading Japanese troops. To the right of centre, with his arm being supported, is Major John Hilger, the captain of the 14th bomber to take-off, B-25 #40-2297. The other US airmen present, all from his crew, are, left to right, Lieutenant James Macia Jr., Lieutenant Jack Sims, and Staff Sergeant Job Eierman. (NARA)

A number of the Raiders are borne to safety by their Chinese rescuers. Of the 80 men who left *Hornet* on 18 April 1942, 64 eventually returned home. (NARA)

Major John Hilger can be seen standing top left in this picture taken with his Chinese helpers soon after 18 April 1942. The other survivor lying under the blanket in the left foreground may well be Hilger's flight engineer, Staff Sergeant Job Eierman. (NARA)

massive search for the surviving airmen through the eastern coastal provinces of China. So brutal was this operation that an estimated 10,000 Chinese were killed by the Japanese in their hunt for the raiders.

Of the 16 B-25Bs, one landed intact at Vladivostok, where the Soviets interned it and its crew, whilst the others crashed, or the crew baled-out, at or off the coast of China. One man was killed when he fell down a cliff after baling out and two others drowned when their aircraft crashed into the sea. Fourteen complete crews made it back to safety (except one man who was killed in action with the Japanese), thanks to the efforts of the Chinese. Eight men, however, were captured by the Japanese. Three of the crew from the sixth B-25 to take-off (#40-2298, nicknamed *The Green Hornet*) survived the ditching of their aircraft only to be taken prisoner, as were all five men from Lieutenant William Farrow's *Bat Out of Hell* (#40-2268), the last of the bombers to leave the carrier.

Over the months that followed, these men were variously beaten, tortured, subjected to mock executions and placed on a starvation diet by the Kempeitai, the Japanese secret police. Then, on 28 August 1942, the prisoners were subjected to a 'farcical' court martial. By this time one of the men, Lieutenant Dean Hallmark, had lost 80lbs. A mere skeleton, he was only semi-conscious and had to be carried into the courtroom on a stretcher. He was too weak to even brush the flies that smothered his face.

For his part in the Raid, Doolittle was awarded the Medal of Honor. All the other crew members received the Distinguished Flying Cross, 23 of which were presented by Lieutenant General Henry H. 'Hap' Arnold at a ceremony held at Bolling Field airbase, in Washington D.C., on 27 June 1942. It is that ceremony that is seen here. (NARA)

On the afternoon of an overcast and foggy 15 October 1942, Hallmark and two other Doolittle raiders, Lieutenant William Farrow and Sergeant Harold Spatz, were taken to Shanghai Public Cemetery No.1. There the men were given the opportunity to offer a silent prayer, before being blindfolded, forced to kneel and tied to a small cross. At 16.00 hours precisely, all three were executed by a single shot in the head.

The other captured airmen remained in military confinement on a starvation diet, their health rapidly deteriorating until April 1943, when they were moved to Nanking. There they began to receive slightly better treatment, but Lieutenant Bob Meder developed beriberi and died on 1 December 1943. The four survivors were finally liberated by US troops in August 1945.

MEDAL OF HONOR

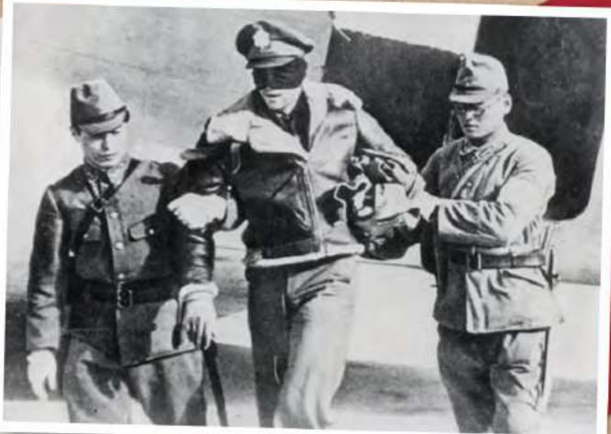
The first the American public knew of the raid was in the newspapers the following day, 19 April. In announcing the raid, sections of the US press opted to quote their Japanese counterparts. The *New York Times*, for example, noted the following: 'Enemy bombers appeared over Tokyo for the first time in the current war, inflicting damage on schools and hospitals. Invading planes failed to cause any damage on military establishments, although casualties in the schools and hospitals were as yet unknown. This inhuman attack on these cultural establishments and on residential districts is causing widespread indignation among the populace … Nine of the attacking planes were shot down and the rest repulsed by heavy anti-aircraft fire.'

A slightly later, and much exaggerated, Japanese report gave a few more alleged details: 'A large fleet of heavy bombers appeared over Tokyo this noon and caused much damage to non-military objectives and some damage to factories. The known death toll is between three and four thousand so far. No planes were reported shot down over Tokyo. Osaka was also bombed. Tokyo reports several large fires burning.'[2]

Though these reports indicated that the raid had succeeded, it was not until a message was received on 20 April from General Joseph Stilwell, who was the Allied chief-of-staff to the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, that the fate of the crews and their aircraft was learned: 'Chinese air force has confused message in substance as follows – 3 repeat 3 crew members report they flew 21 hours, that 16 airplanes started, that bad weather dispersed the formation. Weather still precludes flying in entire area. Further information will be forwarded when received.'[3]

The White House, though, remained tight-lipped, with no official announcement being made until 21 April. At a press conference the president was asked about the raid, to which question Roosevelt, determined that the Japanese would learn nothing from his comments, answered, to the amusement of the assembled reporters, that the attack had been delivered 'from our new secret base at Shangri-La!'

Roosevelt was privately delighted with the raid. He wrote to Winston Churchill, remarking that, 'As you will have seen in the press we have had a good crack at Japan by air and I am hoping that we can make it very difficult for them to keep too many of the big ships in the Indian Ocean [thus helping Britain in its defence of India]. I am frank to say that I feel better about the war than at any time in the past two years.'[4]



A blind-folded Lieutenant Robert Hite, co-pilot of the 16th B-25, being led from a transport aircraft by his Japanese captors after he and seven other captured airmen had been flown from China to Tokyo. After about 45 days in Japan, Hite, along with seven other Raiders, was taken back to China by ship and imprisoned in Shanghai. He was held for a total of some 40 months before being liberated in 1945. His weight had dropped to 76lbs, from 180, by the time the war ended. (US Air Force)

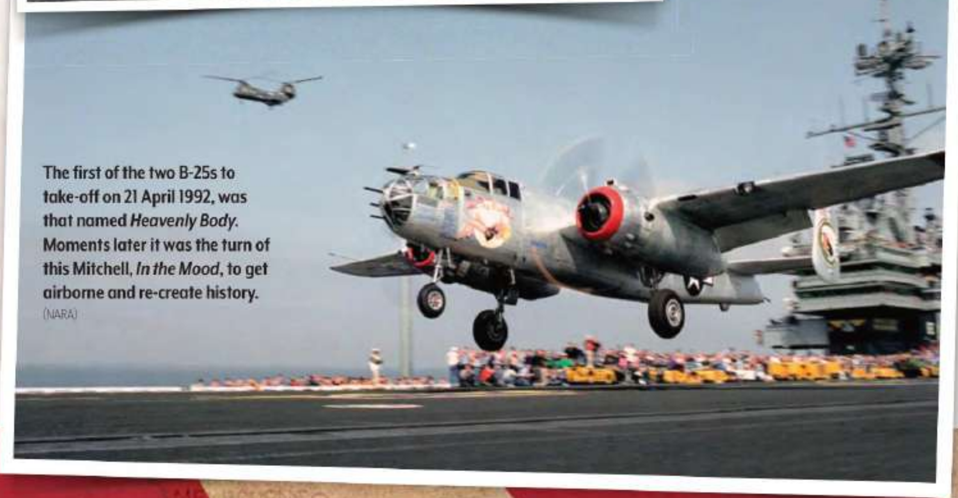
For his part, Halsey called the raid 'one of the most courageous deeds in all military history'. Unsurprisingly, Doolittle was immediately promoted to the rank of brigadier general and was awarded the Medal of Honor. All the other crew members received the Distinguished Flying Cross, 23 of which were distributed at an investiture ceremony held at Bolling Field airbase, in Washington D.C., on 27 June 1942.

FIGHTING BACK

Although the material damage inflicted by Doolittle's raiders proved relatively small and casualties light by the standards of subsequent attacks – eighty-seven people were killed and less than 500 were wounded – the effect of the air raid on the enemy was enormous, passing 'like a shiver over Japan' as one man described it. The raid created great alarm in Tokyo where it had been assumed that the city would never be attacked in this way. Such was the shock of the bombing that a large number of front-line aircraft were withdrawn from offensive operations to defend the Japanese capital.

The 'Doolittle Raid' also had an immediate and electrifying effect on the American public, with newspapers and periodicals emblazoned with huge headlines. Morale, consequently, soared across the nation with much of the population cheered by the news that the United States was at last fighting back.

Remarkably, the Doolittle Raid was not the last time that a B-25 was flown of the deck of a US Navy aircraft carrier. On 21 April 1992, almost fifty years to the day since the raiders' strike against Japan, a pair of veteran B-25 Mitchells was launched from the deck of the supercarrier USS *Ranger* as part of the commemorations of the attack. The two B-25s that participated in the 50th anniversary carrier launching are pictured here parked on the rear of the flight deck of USS *Ranger* whilst the carrier was underway in the Pacific in April 1992. (NARA)



The first of the two B-25s to take-off on 21 April 1992, was that named *Heavenly Body*. Moments later it was the turn of this Mitchell, *In the Mood*, to get airborne and re-create history. (NARA)

NOTES

1. Carroll V. Glines, *Doolittle's Tokyo Raiders* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, London, 1981), p.164.
2. Quoted in *Osprey's Battles of World War II, Japan 1942, America's first strike back at Japan* (Osprey, Botley, 2006), p.83.
3. Glines, p.383.
4. Quoted in James M. Scott, *Target Tokyo, Jimmy Doolittle and the Raid that Avenged Pearl Harbor* (Norton, London, 2015), p.321.

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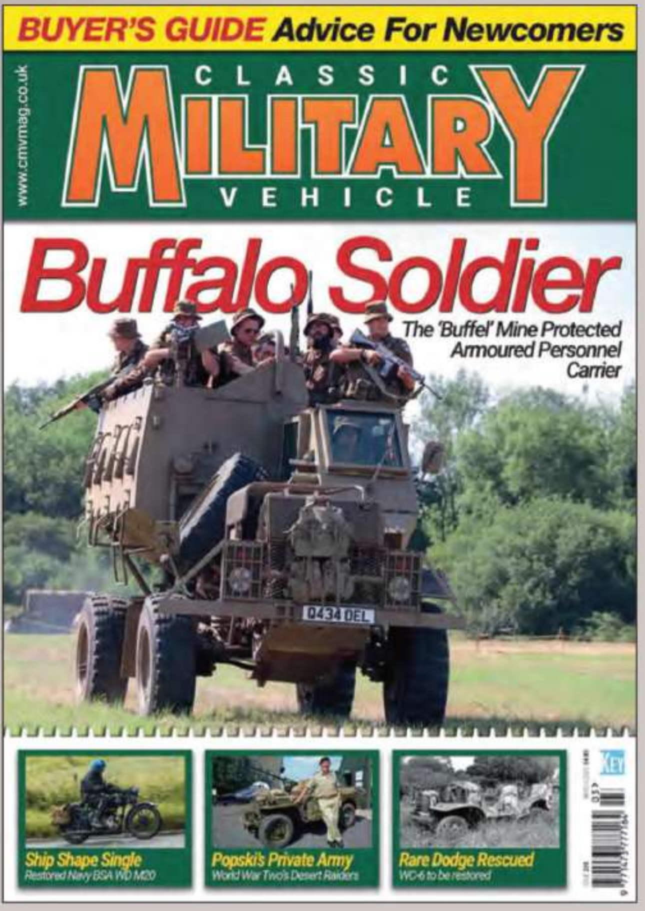
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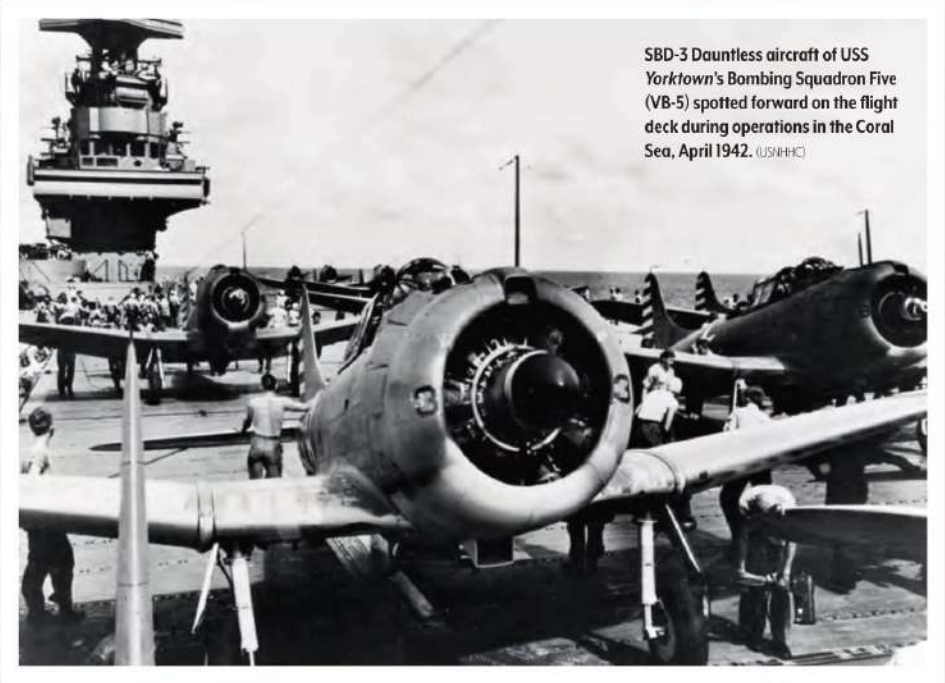
The advance of the Japanese across the Pacific, and the lands which border the largest of all oceans, had been so rapid that in just four months they had achieved all their primary goals, giving them territories rich in the raw materials they required to make Japan self-sufficient. By the middle of April 1942, the Japanese were ready to implement the second stage of their great scheme, of consolidating their hold by establishing a defensive perimeter for what they called the 'Southern Resources Area'.

The original intention was that this perimeter would consist of Wake Island, the Marshal Islands, the Bismarck Archipelago, Timor, Java, Sumatra, Malaya and Burma. However, the apparent ease with which the Allied forces had been beaten encouraged some of the leading military figures to urge even further expansion. The more cautious elements opposed this but the shock which reverberated around Emperor Hirohito's Imperial Palace, both physically and


SBD-3 Dauntless aircraft of USS *Yorktown*'s Bombing Squadron Five (VB-5) spotted forward on the flight deck during operations in the Coral Sea, April 1942. (USNHHC)

CAUGHT IN THE CORAL SEA

The Japanese sought to expand their defensive perimeter, but the Allies were determined to stop them. The result was a naval battle, the like of which had never been seen before.

The end of USS *Lexington* nears. Burning and sinking, the carrier is pictured here after her crew abandoned ship. Note the aircraft parked aft, where fires have not yet reached. (USNHHC)

metaphorically, when the bombs of Jimmy Doolittle's B-25s exploded on Tokyo on 18 April, added weight to the proposal to extend the defensive perimeter. The expansionist proposal was accepted.

That new perimeter was to be widened to include the western Aleutian Islands, Midway, Samoa, Fiji, New Caledonia and Port Moresby in south-east New Guinea. It was the occupation of the last of these, Port Moresby, which the Japanese aimed to undertake first. The Japanese had already established themselves on the northeast coast of New Guinea and by taking Port Moresby they would be able to dominate the whole of the island of New Guinea as well as being in a position to attack Australia. En route to Port Moresby, the Japanese planned to seize Tulagi in the South Solomon Islands, from where they would be able to attack the main communications route between the USA and the Antipodes.

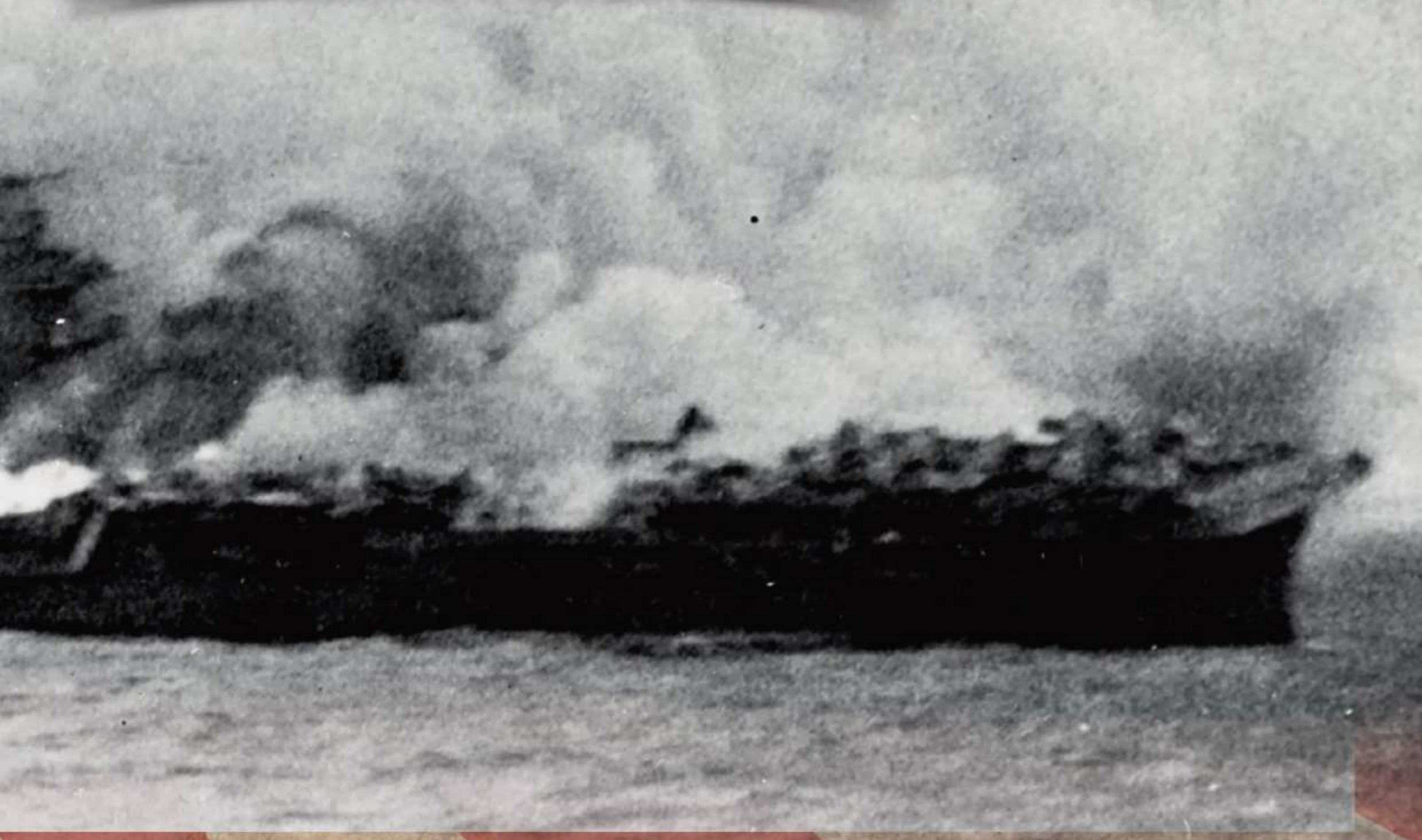
As had proven so successful so far in the Pacific War, the Japanese were to spearhead their offensive with the aircraft of the Carrier Strike Force. But after having operated with little respite in operations which stretched across a third of the globe, only two fleet carriers were available for the attack upon Tulagi and Port Moresby. Supporting them were three heavy cruisers, two light carriers, two light cruisers, seven destroyers, an auxiliary seaplane carrier and a minelayer.

The Occupation Force was composed of four heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, six destroyers and auxiliary seaplane carrier and a minelayer, and a number of submarines. The troops that would occupy these two places were in five transports.

Allied losses had been very heavy and the ships they could assemble were numerically far inferior to those of the enemy. Yet the Allies had one major advantage – they could intercept and decipher Japanese signals. So, when Japanese warships began to concentrate at their base at Truk Lagoon, the Allies already knew that an attack on Port Moresby was likely to take place in the first week of May and could prepare accordingly.

Task Force 11 and Task Force 17, under the overall command of Rear Admiral Jack Fletcher, along with an Australian-United States Support Force, Task Force 44, under Rear Admiral John Crace, rendezvoused on 1 May some 300 miles west of the New Hebrides. Two days later Fletcher received information that the Japanese had invaded, and captured, Tulagi and he sailed to position his ships to strike at the enemy at first light the next morning.

USS *Yorktown* being refuelled by USS *Neosho* at sea on 1 May 1942, shortly before the Battle of Coral Sea. Note the use of *Yorktown*'s aircraft crane to support her end of the refuelling rig. *Neosho* was bombed by Japanese carrier planes on 7 May 1942, being scuttled on 11 May. (USNHHC)



TULAGI ATTACK

Forty-six aircraft from the carrier USS *Yorktown* launched an attack upon the Japanese forces at Tulagi at 08.15 hours on 3 April, taking the enemy completely by surprise. The bombers and torpedo-bombers met practically no opposition from the air and only ineffectual anti-aircraft fire from the ground. *Yorktown*'s aircraft returned to refuel, going on to carry out two further attacks, the last of which was just after 13.00 hours. Though the pilots claimed to have sunk or damaged numerous Japanese ships, the actual results were disappointing, with just one destroyer and four landing barges being destroyed.

The view from one of USS *Yorktown*'s Torpedo Squadron Five (VT-5) TBD-1 Devastators during the attacks on the Japanese aircraft carrier *Shōkaku* during the morning of 8 May 1942. The carrier is visible left of centre in the distance. (US Navy)

The attacks on *Shōhō* continue in the late morning of 7 May 1942. A TBD Devastator can be seen lower right centre, whilst another aircraft is visible centre top. The photograph was taken from one of USS Yorktown's torpedo bombers. (USNHHC)

The moment that a torpedo hits the Japanese carrier *Shōhō* during the late morning of 7 May 1942. This picture was taken from of the aircraft operating from USS *Lexington*. (US Navy)

The attack upon Tulagi was nothing more than a glancing blow, an opportunist punch thrown as Task Force 17 passed by on its mission to intercept Admiral Takeo Takagi's Carrier Strike Force. There had been no pressing need to attack Tulagi and for the destruction of a single destroyer, the one great advantage Fletcher possessed, that of surprise, was thrown away. Takagi now knew that there were US carriers in the area, and he saw the chance to complete the job started at Pearl Harbor.

After the Tulagi interlude, Task Force 17 re-joined Task Forces 11 and 44. The combined force was now composed of two fleet carriers (*Yorktown* and *Lexington*), nine cruisers and 14 destroyers. The opposing forces were surprisingly evenly matched in both numbers and types of warships and aircraft. In terms of the latter, the Japanese fleet carriers *Shōkaku* and *Zuikaku* and the light carrier *Shōhō* carried 127 aircraft to the *Yorktown*'s and *Lexington*'s 128.

It was aircraft that prompted the first significant move in the battle that was to come. On the morning of 6 May, the Japanese Occupation Force aiming for Port Moresby was spotted and attacked by long-range shore-based Boeing B-17s. This prompted Admiral Shigeyoshi Inoue, in overall command of what was termed Operation *Mo*, to order the transports of the Occupation Force to retire to Rabaul and for all other naval units to concentrate for what was to be one of the key naval battles in the Pacific War.

Yorktown's scout planes set off at 06.19 hours

> **"When we attacked the enemy carriers, we ran into a virtual wall of anti-aircraft fire."**

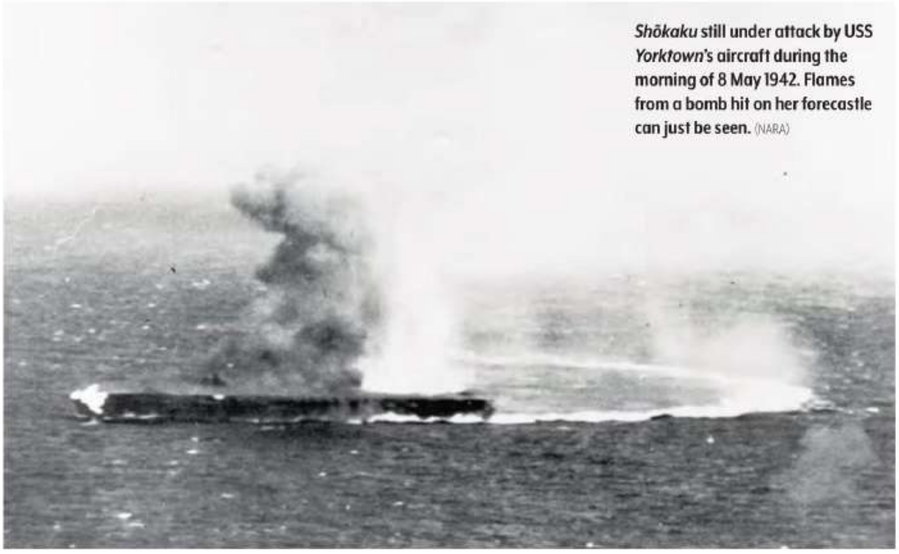
on 7 May to locate the Japanese fleet. After a number of unsuccessful searches, at 08.15 hours it was reported that two carriers and four heavy cruisers had been spotted around 40 miles north of Misima Island. On receipt of this information, *Lexington* began launching its air group of ten Wildcat fighters, 28 Douglas SBD Dauntless bombers and twelve Douglas TBD Devastator torpedo-bombers. Nearly an hour later, at 09.44 hours, *Yorktown* began launching its own air group of 25 Dauntless bombers of which 16 were armed with 1,000lb bombs, ten Devastators and five Wildcats.

A CARRIER IS SUNK

At 10.30 hours, *Yorktown*'s scout planes began landing back on the carrier and at this point it was found that owing to what was described as a fault in the reporting mechanism, the earlier message of two carriers having been sighted was incorrect. What the pilot had actually seen were two cruisers. The decision was made to redirect *Lexington*'s air group to a position signalled to the task force by shore-based US aircraft which had reported finding two carriers and four heavy cruisers south of the island of Bougainville. What had actually been spotted was the Occupation Force's covering force which included the light carrier *Shōhō*.

MEDAL OF HONOR ACTION

One of the US airmen who contributed to *Shōhō*'s destruction on 7 May – Lieutenant (Junior Grade) William E. Hall, seen here a couple of years after the Battle of the Coral Sea. For his actions, Hall was awarded the Medal of Honor, the citation for which states: 'In a resolute and determined attack on 7 May, Lt. (j.g.) Hall dived his plane at an enemy Japanese aircraft carrier, contributing materially to the destruction of that vessel. On 8 May, facing heavy and fierce fighter opposition, he again displayed extraordinary skill as an airman and the aggressive spirit of a fighter in repeated and effectively executed counterattacks against a superior number of enemy planes in which 3 enemy aircraft were destroyed. Though seriously wounded in this engagement, Lt. (j.g.) Hall, maintaining the fearless and indomitable tactics pursued throughout these actions, succeeded in landing his plane safe.' At the time, Hall was flying an SBD Dauntless of USS *Lexington*'s Scouting Squadron 2. (US Navy)



***Shōkaku* still under attack by USS *Yorktown*'s aircraft during the morning of 8 May 1942. Flames from a bomb hit on her forecastle can just be seen.** (NARA)

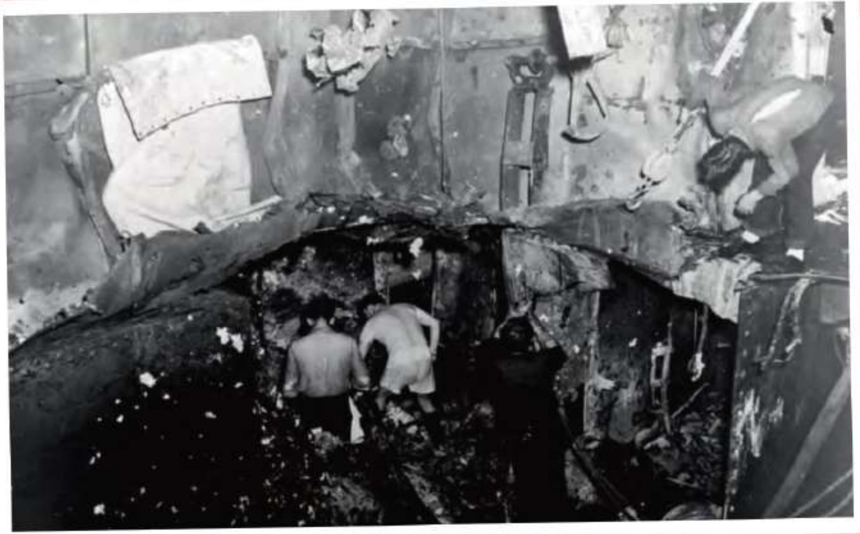
Lexington's aircraft made contact with *Shōhō* at around 11.00 hours and attacked at once. Again, the Japanese were taken by surprise. One or more of the bombers hit the carrier in the first wave, causing a small fire and possibly damaging her steering gear. This, however, did not stop *Shōhō* turning into wind so that she could launch her own aircraft, ten or more of which were on her flight deck. But as she turned *Lexington*'s planes delivered a second attack, followed almost immediately by *Yorktown*'s Dauntless bombers which had just arrived at the scene of the action.

With good visibility, the target was a perfect one. *Shōhō* was steaming into wind, making no attempt to manoeuvre. The four or five cruisers that formed her protective screen were on a 5,000- to 6,000-yard circle, too far away to provide any effective anti-aircraft fire. *Shōhō*'s fighter patrol had been drawn away by *Lexington*'s first wave, leaving the carrier completely at the mercy of the American aircraft.

Shōhō was completely overwhelmed by the mass attack, the bombers diving steeply from 18,000 feet to release their bombs at about 250 feet. By the time that *Yorktown*'s Devastators arrived, the Japanese carrier was burning fiercely and listing to port. The torpedo-bombers, flying in at less than 1,000 feet, were unaware that *Shōhō* was already a wreck when they arrived at around 11.15 hours, and they released their weapons at very close range, smashing into the starboard beam of the hapless carrier. Just three minutes after the last of the American aircraft veered away, *Shōhō* capsized and sank.

The Americans reported 21 bomb and 19 torpedo strikes; the Japanese official report stating 13 and seven hits respectively. While this may seem a great success, it could be argued that a huge opportunity had been let slip. There was no need for the Devastators to use their torpedoes on the already doomed *Shōhō* and, having done so, they had no weapons with which to attack the Japanese cruisers. The mass attack by 53 dive bombers, 22 torpedo planes and 18 fighters had resulted in the destruction of just one 11,000-ton light carrier – leaving the two Japanese fleet carriers somewhere in the region and ready to deliver a counter-strike.

A Nakajima Ki-27 Type 97 carrier attack aircraft is hit by anti-aircraft fire during attacks on the US aircraft carriers late in the morning of 8 May 1942. (UNHHC)



Damage caused amidships on USS *Yorktown*'s third and fourth decks by a 250kg bomb during the Battle of Coral Sea on 8 May 1942. The photographer is in compartment C-301-L, looking down through the third deck into compartment C-402-A. The large hole in the deck was made by the bomb's explosion. Many men were killed or badly injured in C-301-L, a crew's messing space that was the assembly area for the ship's engineering repair party. (USNHHC)

USS *Lexington* hit and burning, during the latter part of the Japanese air attack on 8 May. Note the anti-aircraft bursts in the vicinity, and an aircraft off the carrier's bow. (USNHHC)

USS *Lexington* under air attack on 8 May 1942, as photographed from a Japanese plane. Heavy black smoke from her stack and white smoke from her bow indicate that the picture was taken just after those areas were hit by bombs. (USNHHC)

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

That the Japanese were searching for the Allied fleet was apparent from the radar readings picked up that morning just before the launching of the air groups from *Yorktown* and *Lexington*. Wildcats were sent by *Yorktown* to intercept the enemy aircraft, but they failed to find the Japanese 'planes. Nevertheless, after launching its air group, *Lexington* retained eight of its Dauntless scout bombers for anti-submarine patrols and *Yorktown* had kept enough fighters to be able to mount continuous air combat patrols throughout the day.

Japanese aircraft had, in fact, located the carrier task forces in the forenoon and one of their four-engine patrol planes had been shot down by fighters from *Yorktown*. Fletcher's scouts, on the other hand, had still not found the remaining Japanese carriers. He therefore decided to make no further attacks upon the Japanese Occupation Force and to hold all his aircraft back until the carriers had been located.

Tension mounted on board the American carriers. Wildcats were still being sent out to investigate a number of radar contacts, but these all proved to be *Yorktown*'s own fighters not using radar identification. The day wore agonisingly on. They knew the Japanese were near – but where?

As night approached, a Japanese seaplane came within sight of *Yorktown*, escaping into the fading light despite chase being given by two air groups. A little over an hour later, at 17.47 hours, radar displayed a force of around 27 bombers or torpedo-bombers. These had been despatched by Rear Admiral Chúichi Hara during the afternoon to make a dusk attack on the American force. The Japanese bombers searched for 300 miles but failed to find the US carriers. Eventually, they abandoned their search, jettisoned their bombs, and set off back to their ships.

Meanwhile, *Lexington*'s fighters had engaged nine Mitsubishi Zero fighters, which were providing cover for the Japanese bomber group, shooting down three or four of the enemy. *Yorktown*'s fighters soon joined in, claiming another three Zeros. The Americans lost three fighters of their own. But then followed one of the most bizarre incidents of the Pacific War.

With night approaching fast, the Japanese pilots of the bomber group became disoriented and lost their way. When they saw the two US carriers, they mistook them for their own ships and started to prepare to land, with their running lights on and flashing in Morse code on an Aldis lamp. At the last

"The Japanese pilot frantically opened his throttle, and, at full speed, swung away from the vessel followed by his astonished men."

A Douglas SBD Dauntless of VS-2 passes through the screen for USS *Lexington* during the anti-torpedo plane patrol action on 8 May. According to some sources, this aircraft may be either that of Lieutenant Junior Grade William E. Hall (who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions that day) or Ensign John A. Leppla, (who was awarded a Navy Cross). (NARA) minute, the leading Japanese pilot realised his mistake and veered off, the others following, as a Wildcat, recognising the aircraft as the enemy opened fire.

A little while later, at 19.10 hours, more Japanese aircraft tried to land on *Yorktown*, being driven away by anti-aircraft fire. Some nervous American gunners responded to the incident by firing at any aircraft above the task force, including friendly returning Wildcat fighters. The Japanese were angered and frustrated with the whole episode, as one airman later recalled: 'Our aircraft soon fell victim to the delusions and "mirages" brought on by exhaustion. Several times the pilots, despairing of their position over the sea "sighted" a friendly aircraft carrier. Finally, a carrier was sighted, and the remaining eighteen bombers switched on their signal and blinker lights as they swung into their approach and landing pattern.

'As the lead aircraft, with its flaps down and speed lowered, drifted toward the carrier deck to land, the pilot discovered the great ship ahead was an American carrier! Apparently, the Americans also had erred in identification, for even as the bomber dropped near the carrier deck, not a single enemy gun fired. The Japanese pilot frantically opened his throttle, and, at full speed, swung away from the vessel followed by his astonished men.

'Our aircrews were disgusted. They had flown for gruelling hours over the sea, bucked thunder squalls and, finally, had lost all trace of their positions relative to their own carriers. When finally they did sight the coveted American warship, cruising unsuspecting beneath eighteen bombers, they were without bombs or torpedoes.' Only 18 out of the 27 aircraft that had flown out that afternoon made it back. All the dead were veteran pilots and could not be easily replaced by the Japanese.

Nightfall brought an end to operations. The Japanese had halted their assault upon Port Moresby and had lost *Shōhō*, as well as a considerable number of strike aircraft. But all had not gone well for the Allies either. Japanese aircraft had attacked and sunk the oiler USS *Neosho* and her escort, the destroyer USS *Sims*, which had been detached from Task Force 17.

Admiral Crace's Task Force 44 had also come under attack from some 13 or 14 Mitsubishi Ki-21 Type 97 torpedo-bombers with fighter support from the 25th Air Flotilla at Rabaul. With no aircraft cover, the task force came under a barrage of torpedoes and machine-gun fire from all angles. The ships put up a curtain of anti-aircraft fire and took fast evasive action. None of the torpedoes found a target. A second wave of Mitsubishi A5M Type 96 high-level bombers then attacked the US-Australian force, and, remarkably, Crace's ships again all avoided serious damage.

CARRIERS UNDER ATTACK

As dawn approached on 8 May 1942, search aircraft were sent out from both *Yorktown* and *Lexington* at 06.25 hours, about 30 minutes before sunrise. Not knowing where the enemy warships were, the aircraft searched 360 degrees around the task forces. By chance, at 08.20 hours, one of the aircraft returning to *Lexington* spotted what was reported as an enemy force of two carriers, four heavy cruisers and some destroyers. The distance was 175 miles. An intercepted radio transmission indicated that the Japanese had also spotted Task Force 17 at approximately the same time. Both sides rushed to launch their aircraft in a race to strike the first blow.

As with the day before, Fletcher sought to deliver a massive hit upon the enemy, and 41 bombers (17 of which carried 1,000lb bombs), 21 torpedo-bombers and nine escorting fighters, were launched. The Japanese similarly threw almost all they had into their attack, with 33 dive bombers, 18 torpedo-bombers and 18 fighters.

Yorktown's Dauntless bombers were the first to reach the Japanese carriers at 10.49 hours, where they circled to wait the arrival of the Devastators. *Zuikaku* headed for a cover of a rain squall, while *Shōkaku* turned to wind to launch its aircraft. Nine minutes later, *Yorktown*'s air group attacked.

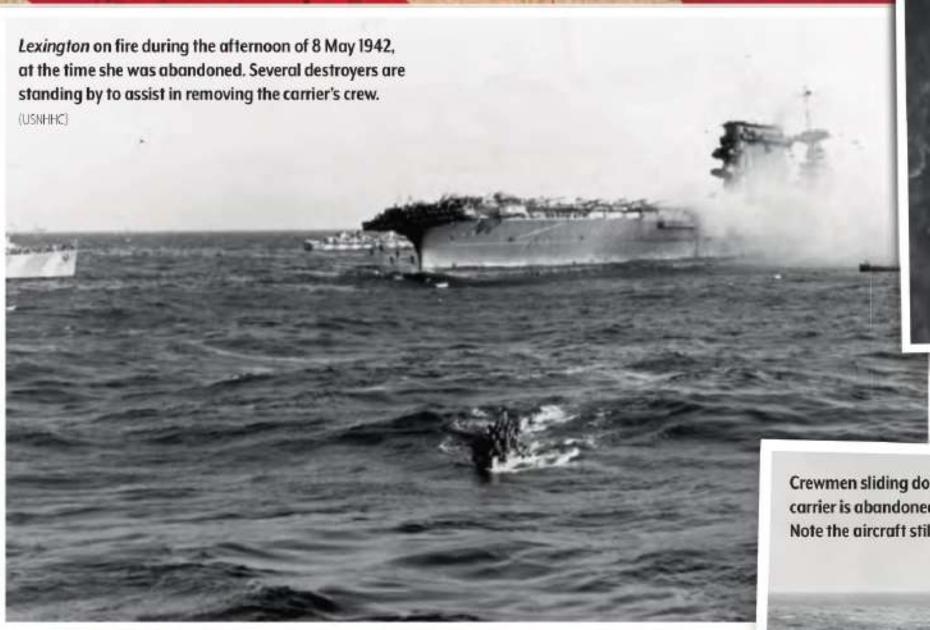
Aircraft returning to USS *Lexington* at about 14.00 hours on 8 May 1942, during the Battle of the Coral Sea. This is the view looking aft along the port side of the flight deck from the front of the bomb-damaged port forward 5-inch gun gallery. Number two 5/25 gun is in the foreground, trained out and still in operation. The damaged number four and number six 5/25 guns are immediately beyond. A TBD-1 torpedo bomber is on the flight deck, taxiing forward after landing, and a F4F-3 fighter is approaching to land. (NARA)

The scene on *Lexington*'s flight deck at about 15.00 hours on 8 May 1942. The ship's air group is spotted aft, with Grumman F4F-3 fighters nearest the camera. SBD scout bombers and TBD-1 torpedo planes are parked further aft. The smoke that can be seen rising around the after aircraft elevator is from fires burning in the hangar below. (NARA)

They were met by heavy anti-aircraft fire as well as defending Zeros; the Japanese fighters were in turn engaged by *Yorktown*'s Wildcats. The dive-bombers scored two hits on *Shōkaku*, tearing open the forecastle and causing heavy damage to the carrier's flight and hangar decks. It was then the turn of the Devastators, but the Japanese carrier was able to avoid all nine torpedoes.

In deteriorating weather conditions, *Lexington*'s air group had difficulty finding the Japanese carriers. After flying to the end of their navigational leg without sighting the enemy, they began flying round a square. Then, as one Wildcat broke through cloud its pilot saw *Zuikaku* below him accompanied by a cruiser and a destroyer. However, at around the same time, four of *Lexington*'s Dauntlesses and eleven Devastators located *Shōkaku* and attacked, scoring just one hit from the dive-bombers. In battles with the Zeros from the carriers, seven Wildcats were shot down and one Devastator and three Dauntlesses ran out of fuel and failed to make it back to their ship. The Japanese fighters suffered similar losses in the dog-fights over the carriers.

Members of USS *Lexington*'s crew gather on the flight deck at about 17.00 hours on 8 May, as they prepare to abandon ship following the series of explosions that produced uncontrollable fires and brought the carrier to a stop. (USNHHC)



Lexington on fire during the afternoon of 8 May 1942, at the time she was abandoned. Several destroyers are standing by to assist in removing the carrier's crew. (USNHHC)

Survivors from USS *Lexington* are pulled aboard a cruiser, probably USS *Minneapolis*, after the carrier was abandoned during the afternoon of 8 May 1942. (US Navy)

Crewmen sliding down lines at the stern of USS *Lexington* as the carrier is abandoned during the afternoon of 8 May 1942. Note the aircraft still parked on the flight deck. (NARA)

THE COUNTER-ATTACK

Though *Shōkaku* had been hit, *Zuikaku* had escaped the US attack and its aircraft were soon about to retaliate. Defensive combat air patrols were sent up from both *Lexington* and *Yorktown*. Yet despite ample warning and directions being given by the radar on *Lexington*, only three of 17 Wildcats managed to engage the approaching enemy bombers.

Lieutenant Commander Shigekazu Shimazaki, in charge of *Zuikaku*'s strike group, sent 14 torpedo-bombers against *Lexington* and four against *Yorktown*. Despite an intense anti-aircraft barrage from the American carriers and their escorting warships, the Japanese pilots resolutely pressed home their attack.

Shimazaki himself later described the intensity of the anti-aircraft fire: 'When we attacked the enemy carriers, we ran into a virtual wall of anti-aircraft fire. The carriers and their supporting ships blackened the sky with exploding shells and tracers. It seemed impossible that we could survive our bombing and torpedo runs through such incredible defences … I had to fly directly above the waves to escape the enemy shells and tracers. In fact, when I turned away from the enemy carrier, I was so low that I almost struck the bow of the ship, for I was flying below the level of the flight deck. I could see the crewmen of the ship staring at my plane as it rushed by.'[2]

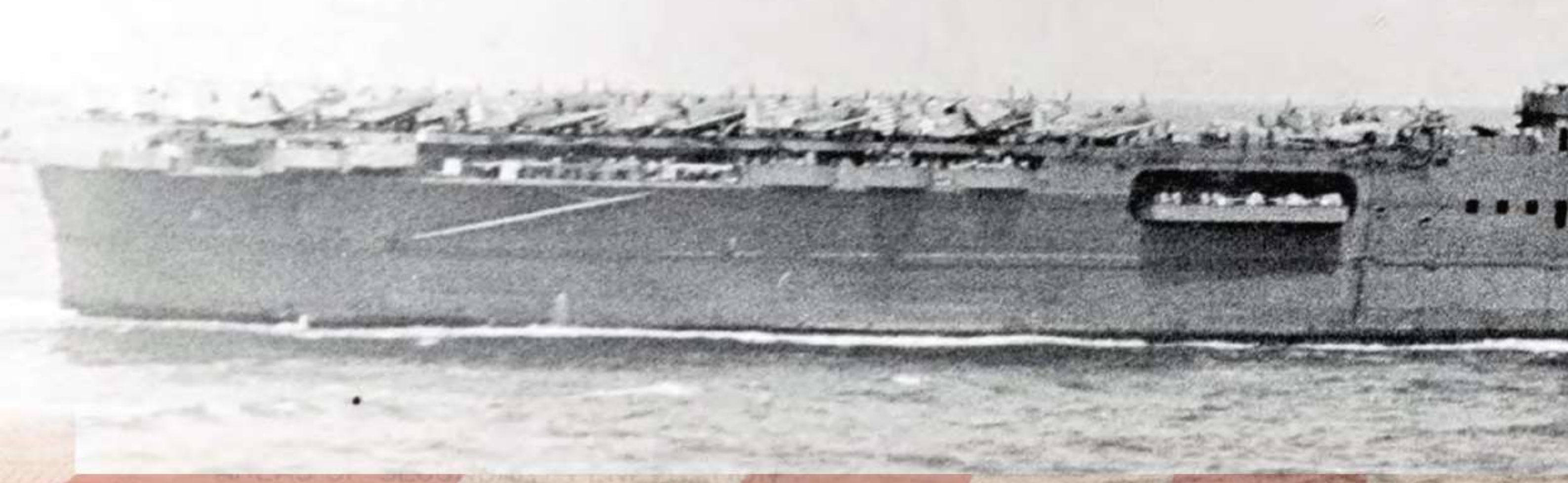
The four torpedoes aimed at *Yorktown* all missed; *Lexington* was not so fortunate. The Japanese pressed home their assault from all directions and Captain Frederick C. Sherman could not avoid them all: 'I turned to port with full rudder to bring the first torpedoes ahead. From then on the torpedoes were coming from both starboard and port, and I maneuvered [*sic*] with full rudder both ways as I considered best to avoid torpedoes. Some from starboard crossed ahead; two others ran parallel to the ship, one on each side; some from port ran ahead; two ran under the ship without hitting. At 11.20 a.m., first torpedo hit the ship and exploded just forward of the port forward gun gallery.'[3]

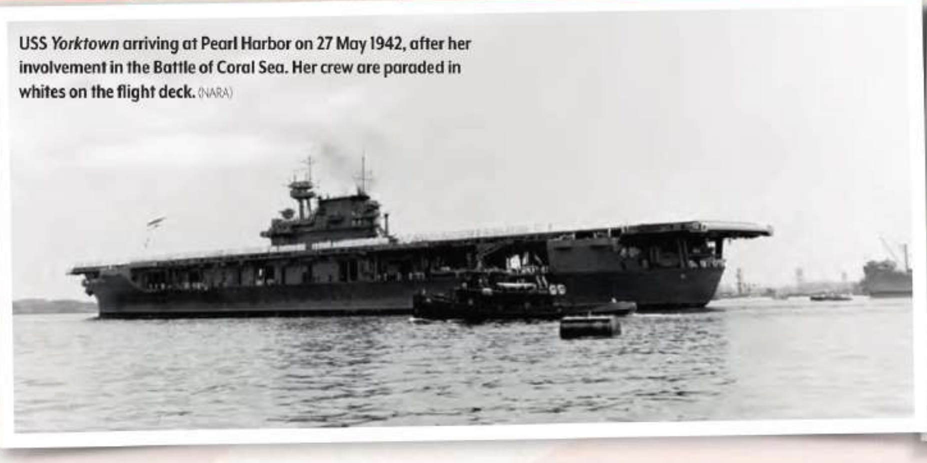
It was then the turn of the Japanese dive-bombers, of which 19 directed their attack upon *Lexington* and 14 targeted *Yorktown*. At almost the same moment that the torpedo struck, a bomb from the Japanese dive-bombers exploded in the ready ammunition locker at the after end of the port forward gun gallery, putting the entire battery out of action and killing all the crew in one gun. Another bomb hit the superstructure on the port side and a small bomb exploded inside the ship's funnel. *Yorktown* was also hit, with one bomb which exploded in the centre of her flight deck.

The retreating Japanese aircraft were severely mauled by the US fighters and dive-bombers. Twenty-three of the 69 aircraft that had flown against the American carriers failed to return.

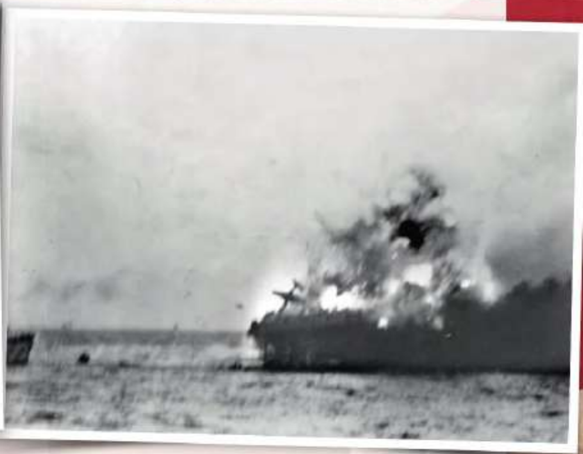
At the end of the attack, which lasted only about 15 minutes, *Lexington* was on fire in four places and was listing to port. But the fires were

The damaged USS *Lexington* underway during the Battle of Coral Sea, 8 May 1942. This view appears to have been taken in the early afternoon, after aircraft had been recovered and initial damage control measures effected, but before the start of the fires that led to the ship's loss. This is the last known photograph of *Lexington* in operational condition. (USNHHC)





USS *Yorktown* arriving at Pearl Harbor on 27 May 1942, after her involvement in the Battle of Coral Sea. Her crew are paraded in whites on the flight deck. (NARA)



A heavy explosion on board USS *Lexington* blows an aircraft over the side. This is probably the explosion from the detonation of torpedo warheads stowed in the starboard side of the hangar, aft, that took place just after Captain Frederick C. Sherman left his command. (USNHHC)

manageable, and the list was quickly corrected by the transfer of oil-fuel. The pumps were keeping the water down, the steering gear was still intact, and *Lexington* was able to make 25 knots under good control. None of the supporting warships had received any damage.

All-in-all the battle appeared to have gone well for the Allies. Though an oiler and a destroyer had been lost, a Japanese invasion had been thwarted for the first time in the war, as the attack on Port Moresby had been abandoned. The Japanese had also lost one of their light carriers and a fleet carrier had been badly damaged – but then, this positive picture was abruptly shattered.

At 12.47 hours, a powerful explosion shook *Lexington*. At first it was thought that a delayed bomb had detonated, but it was later found to have been due to an accumulation of gasoline vapour. A fire took hold which, because of damage caused to the bulkheads by the explosion, began to spread throughout the ship.

The surviving aircraft of the returning air groups were both able to land on their respective ships. The fire on *Lexington*, though, was out of control and at 14.45 hours, all power was lost and, quite literally, the lights went out. With the fire causing small explosions, and water pressure to the fire-fighting pumps gone, there was a real danger of the ship blowing up at any moment. A rescue operation was immediately put in hand, but because of the now heavy list, the accompanying destroyers could not go alongside and most of the crew had to take to rafts or swim to the waiting warships. All but 216 of *Lexington's* 2,951 men were saved.

At 17.50 another large explosion shook the burning carrier, throwing aircraft from her deck high into the air. The destroyer USS *Phelps* was detailed to sink the carrier and at 19.52 hours, five torpedoes sent *Lexington* to the bottom of the ocean, taking 35 aircraft with her.

WHO WAS THE VICTOR?

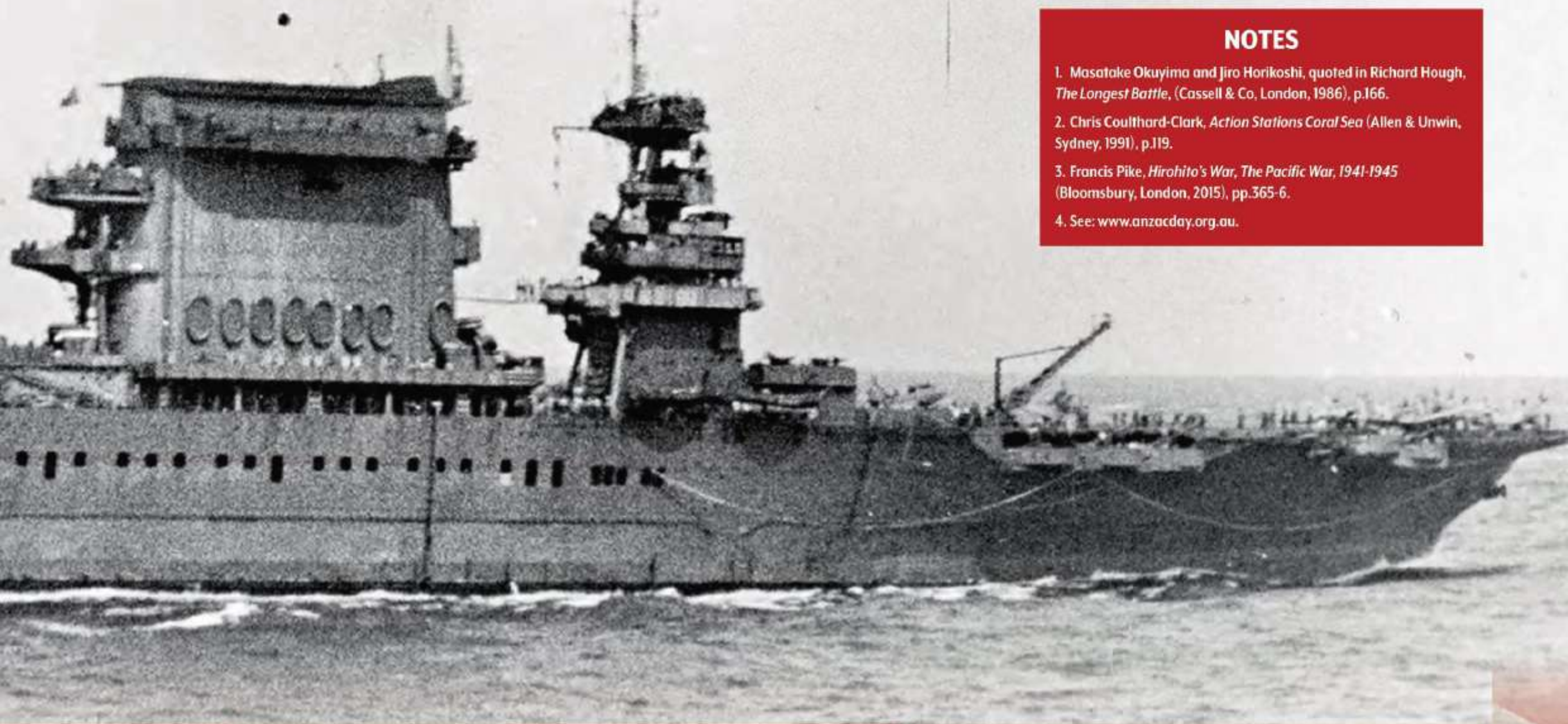
The capture of Port Moresby by the Japanese would have meant the loss by the Allies of their last base in New Guinea and placed a large expanse of the Coral Sea under the control of land-based Japanese aircraft, effectively severing communications between America and Australia. It was also intended that Port Moresby would be one of the springboards from which the Allies would launch their counter-offensive to drive the Japanese out of New Guinea and the Philippines and back to their home islands.

At the same time, for some, notes one author, this "was the battle that saved Australia". This is an exaggerated claim, but there is some validity to it. The battle certainly seemed more significant at the time than modern history books rate it.'[4] The Battle of the Coral Sea can, therefore, be regarded as a tactical victory for the Japanese, as it resulted in the loss of *Lexington*, but a strategic win for the Allies.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first large-scale naval action in which aircraft carriers engaged each other, as well as the first in which the opposing ships neither sighted nor fired directly upon one another, reinforcing what had been shown at Pearl Harbor, that air power had become the dominating factor in warfare.

NOTES

1. Masatake Okuyima and Jiro Horikoshi, quoted in Richard Hough, *The Longest Battle*, (Cassell & Co, London, 1986), p.166.
2. Chris Coulthard-Clark, *Action Stations Coral Sea* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991), p.119.
3. Francis Pike, *Hirohito's War, The Pacific War, 1941-1945* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015), pp.365-6.
4. See: www.anzacday.org.au.



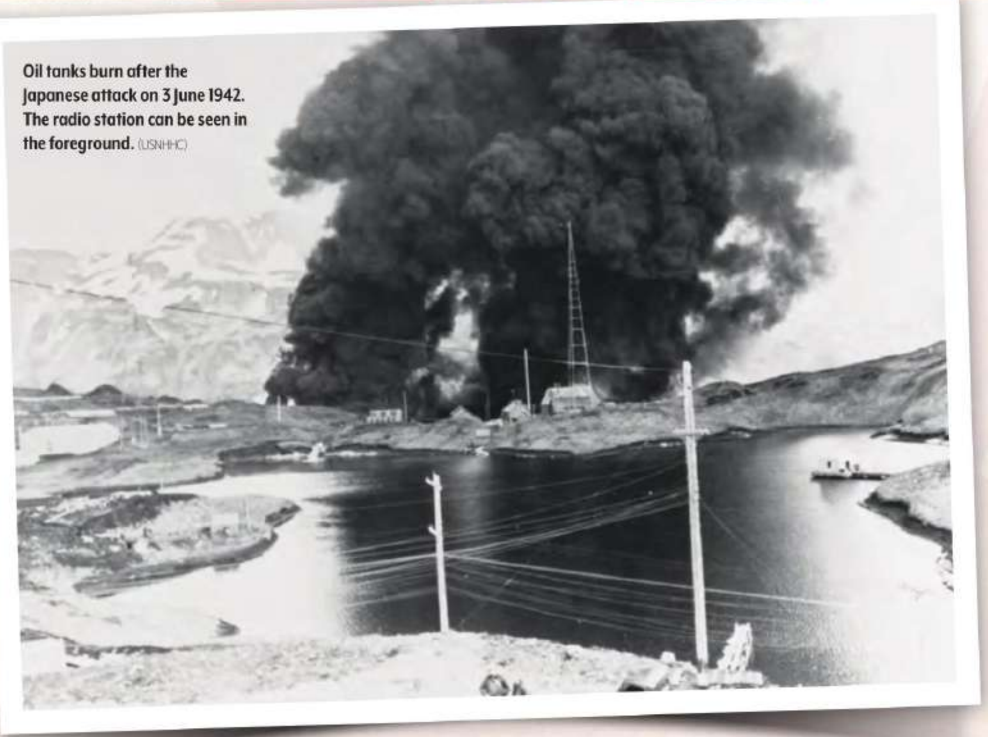
JAPAN INVADES AMERICA

The rapid and aggressive Japanese advances and territorial gains led to what has become known as 'The Forgotten Battle'.

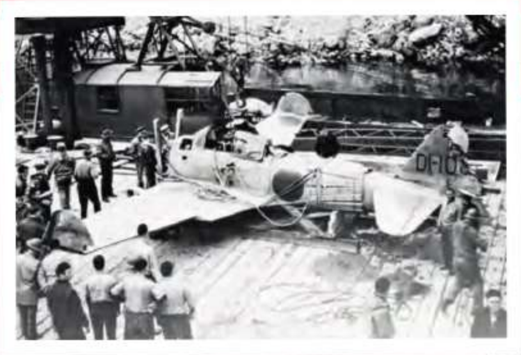
In May 1942, the Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo ordered that preparations be made for an attack on the Midway Islands. At the same time, however, the Japanese plans called for a simultaneous attack on the Aleutian Islands, a chain of 14 large volcanic islands, and 55 smaller ones, the majority of which were part of the 49th American state, Alaska.

The intention behind the assault against the Aleutian Islands was in part to divert American naval forces from Midway, but also to obstruct communication links between the United States and the USSR and to push US airfields further back from Japanese territory. At that time, America's most westerly bases in the Aleutians were the Dutch Harbor Naval Station, the US Army's Fort Mears on Unalaska Island and an airfield on neighbouring Umnak Island. The navy also had a weather station on Kiska Island.

Japan's plans for the Aleutians called for a carrier air attack on both Dutch Harbor and Fort Mears, as well as a 'hit-and-run assault' on Adak Island, which Japanese intelligence

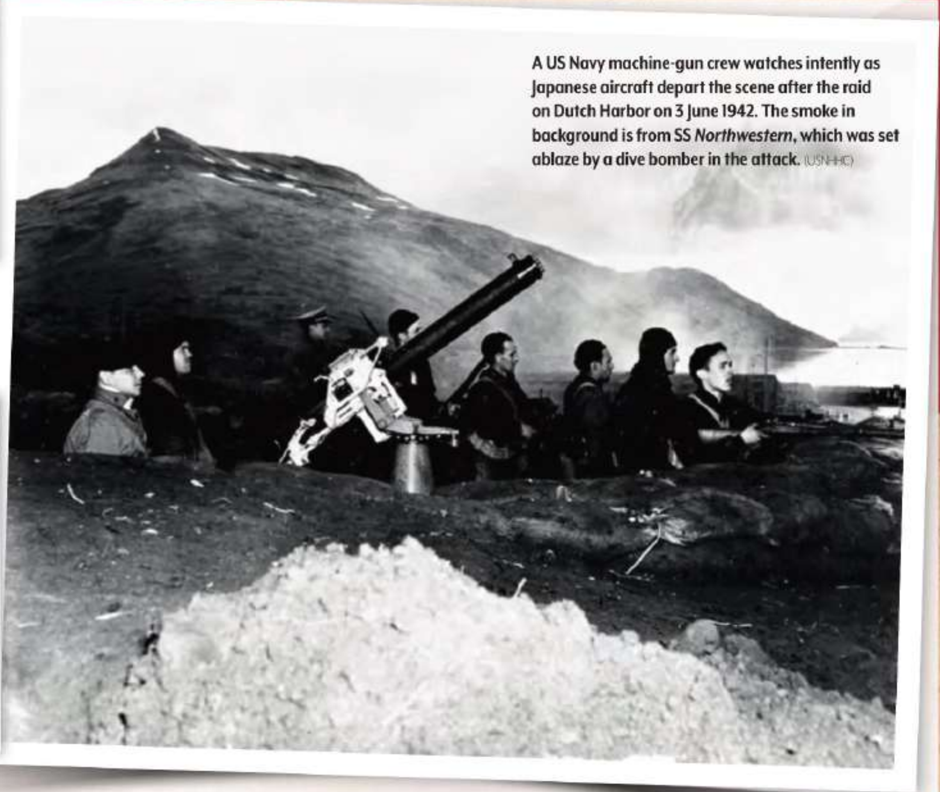


Oil tanks burn after the Japanese attack on 3 June 1942. The radio station can be seen in the foreground. (USNHHC)



A Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero pictured on the quayside at Dutch Harbor, Alaska, on 17 July 1942. This aircraft, from the carrier *Ryûjõ*, had crash landed after the Dutch Harbor Raid on 4 June 1942. Subsequently salvaged, it was the first Zero captured intact for flight tests. (USNHHC)

A warehouse on fire following the attack on Dutch Harbor by Japanese carrier aircraft. (USNHHC)



A US Navy machine-gun crew watches intently as Japanese aircraft depart the scene after the raid on Dutch Harbor on 3 June 1942. The smoke in background is from SS *Northwestern*, which was set ablaze by a dive bomber in the attack. (USNHHC)

mistakenly believed to be fortified, further out on the chain. By means of a separate naval task force, the Japanese also planned the occupation of Kiska and Attu at the end of the Aleutians. For the campaign, Admiral Yamamoto provided the Northern Area Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya, with a force of two small aircraft carriers, five cruisers, 12 destroyers, six submarines, and four troop transports, along with various auxiliary ships.

The Japanese assault on this part of the United States began on 3 June 1942, when, despite poor weather, aircraft from the two carriers, *Jun'yõ* and *Ryújõ*, attacked Dutch Harbor at 05.45 hours. Met by a stiff and determined American response, the raid resulted in little damage. The bombers, however, returned the following day. This time the Japanese aircrews were fully prepared, and by the time the attack ended that afternoon oil storage tanks were burning, the hospital partly demolished, and a beached barracks ship damaged.

America was stunned, and US coastal defences from the Aleutians right through to Panama were immediately put on full alert. Worse, though, was to come.

On 6 June, Japanese troops landed and captured the island of Kisaka. The following day it was the turn of Attu. For the first time since the War of 1812, the continental United States had been invaded – albeit sparsely inhabited areas. It was only the poor weather that had prevented the island of Adak suffering a similar fate.

Despite the Japanese victory and the subsequent blow to American morale, events in the Aleutian Islands were promptly overshadowed by the defining engagements fought elsewhere in the Pacific – at Midway and Guadalcanal. Not for nothing has the Japanese campaign against this part of Alaska been referred to as 'The Forgotten Battle'.

Though blurred, this photograph shows a Japanese A6M2 Zero, on the far left, trailing smoke and probably damaged, during the attacks on Dutch Harbor on 3 June 1942. (USNHHC)

MIDWAY: THE UNPARALLELED VICTORY

On 4 June 1942, the Japanese Imperial Navy suffered a defeat of such cataclysmic proportions that the course of the war in the Pacific turned decisively, and irredeemably, in favour of the Allies.

Despite the setback suffered by the Japanese in their bid to capture Port Moresby, the sinking of the fleet carrier USS *Lexington* meant that they were able to claim a victory, of sorts, at the Battle of the Coral Sea. Certainly, the loss of one carrier and the damage that was also inflicted on USS *Yorktown*, which put the carrier temporarily out of service, placed the Americans in a serious situation in the Pacific, with the enemy able to count double the number of carriers. What better time could there be for the Imperial Japanese Navy to strike at the US fleet and finish the job they started at Pearl Harbor?

That was the view of Admiral Yamamoto. The US Pacific Fleet's aircraft carriers had all been at sea when the Japanese attacked the Hawaiian base on 7 December 1941, which had meant that America still had a powerful offensive force. If, after its losses at Coral Sea, the remaining US carriers could be lured into a battle with the Combined Fleet and destroyed, nothing could stop the Japanese seizing control of the South Pacific.

Even with its massive industrial muscle, it would take the United States many months to rebuild its carrier fleet if it was destroyed. By this time Japan would be able to secure the raw materials needed to keep its war machine functioning and to build all the bases it required across the Pacific, which would enable its aircraft to dominate the land and the sea.

The US Navy, well aware of its weaknesses, was wary of allowing its carriers to be drawn into a battle it had not initiated. Only the severest threat would induce Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief Pacific Ocean Areas, to commit his carriers to action. Yamamoto, therefore, devised a complex plan which, he believed, would persuade Nimitz to throw caution to the wind and release his carriers, by attacking another American base in the Hawaiian Islands – the Naval Air Station on Midway Atoll, which is near the north-western end of the Hawaiian archipelago. Yamamoto would then pounce on the reacting US carriers with his powerful battleships and, at a stroke, end any hope the Americans might have of winning the war in the Pacific.

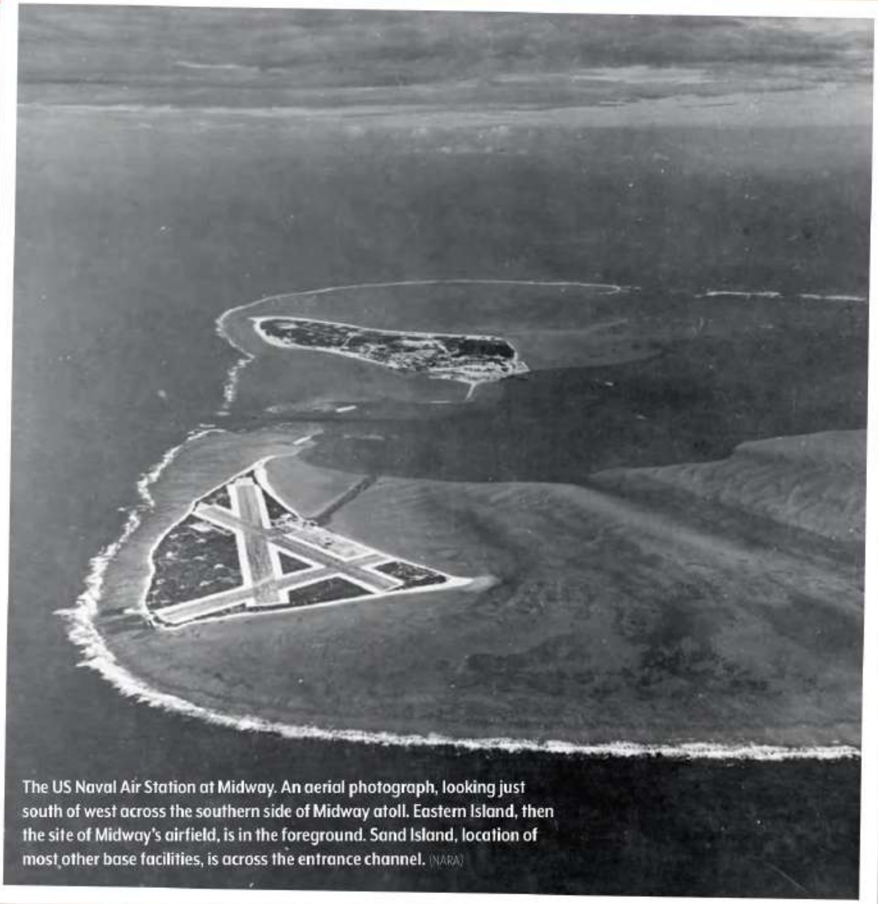
USS *Hornet* is seen in the South Pacific before the Battle of Midway. (NARA)

OPERATION MI

The Japanese believed that strict air patrols were maintained both day and night to a distance of about 500 to 600 miles from Midway and that around three fighters were kept airborne over the islands at all times. Air reconnaissance, it was understood, was conducted mainly to the west and to the south, being less thorough to the northwest and north.

It was considered that the Japanese combat air patrols from their carriers, plus the warships' anti-aircraft fire, could deal successfully with any attempt to counter-attack by US shore-based aircraft – whether it was from Midway or Hawaii. It was also fully acknowledged that Midway was very strongly defended, with powerful fixed fortifications, high-angle anti-aircraft guns, and a garrison of marines, but the invasion force would be of sufficient strength to overcome the island's defences.

Midway Atoll is composed of three islands – Sand Island, East Island and the tiny Spit Island – and Yamamoto's plan called for landings to be made on all three. Despite the strength of the base's defences, the islands are very small and it was felt that no more than six transports would be needed to convey the naval landing force, totalling some 5,000 men. After what was expected to be the quick capture of the islands, two construction battalions would put the base into defensible condition. To accomplish this before the anticipated clash with the US fleet, the Japanese engineers were allocated just one day. That said, Yamamoto's staff expected that it would take three days for the Pacific Fleet to respond, by which time the island would have been turned into a fortress, with the fighters from the carriers defending the skies above, and midget submarines and motor torpedo boats protecting the coastline.[1]



The US Naval Air Station at Midway. An aerial photograph, looking just south of west across the southern side of Midway atoll. Eastern Island, then the site of Midway's airfield, is in the foreground. Sand Island, location of most other base facilities, is across the entrance channel. (NARA)

In what was codenamed Operation *MI*, Yamamoto divided his remaining force into three groups. The first of these was the Midway Occupation Force. The second group, the Carrier Striking Force of the 1st Air Fleet (the *Kido Butai*), with the carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Hiryu* and *Soryu*, commanded by Admiral C. Nagumo, had the dual role of both attacking the US Fleet if located and supporting the invasion force. The carriers were supported by the 2nd Division of the 3rd Battle Squadron (the battleships *Haruna* and *Kirishima*), the 8th Cruiser Squadron (*Tone* and *Chikuma*), and the 10th Destroyer Flotilla (light cruiser *Nagara* and 16 destroyers).

Yamamoto's First Fleet Main Force, the one that he hoped would finally crush the Pacific Fleet, led by him in person, consisted of the 1st and 2nd Battle Squadrons, totalling seven battleships, two cruisers of the 9th Cruiser Squadron, the 3rd Destroyer Flotilla (the cruiser *Sendai* and 12 destroyers), and the light cruiser *Zuiho*.

TURNING THE TABLES

Station Hypo, also known as the Fleet Radio Unit Pacific, based in Hawaii, had been intercepting Japanese naval signals regarding a strike against a target referred to as 'AF' as early as March 1942. Beginning on 1 May, Japanese Navy communications activity from the vicinity of Japan began to increase noticeably. Navy analysts soon realized that the additional intercepts reflected naval exercises conducted in preparation for operations.

Burning oil tanks on Sand Island, Midway, following the Japanese air attack delivered on the morning of 4 June. These tanks were located near what was then the southern shore of Sand Island. The end of the attack was announced at 06.56 hours. (USNHHC)

Captain Marion Carl was among the pilots of VMF-221 who opened their 'tally' on 4 June 1942, when he shot down a Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter which was part of the force heading for Midway. At the controls of a Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat, he also damaged two others. Carl was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions in that decisive battle. He is pictured here in the cockpit of an aeroplane at Anacostia Naval Air Station, Washington, D.C., circa 10 November 1942. (USNHHC)

Though it was suspected that 'AF' was Midway, this remained unconfirmed, until Hypo's Captain Wilfred J. 'Jasper' Holmes came up with a brilliant idea. Knowing that Midway depended on desalinated water, he used an old undersea cable to send a message to the military there. He asked them to send out an un-coded radio message stating that the purification system had broken down, adding: 'We have only enough water for two weeks. Please supply us immediately.'[12] A few days later, the code breakers picked up a Japanese message saying that AF had water problems. That made it certain. They now knew that the Japanese planned to attack Midway.

By studying the form and the substance of the intercepted communications, US Navy analysts obtained an abundance of detail about Japanese plans and the magnitude of the forces to be employed. Over the course of the following weeks, more information was gathered, enabling Nimitz, and Admiral E.J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, to understand Yamamoto's intentions. They knew that the Japanese admiral hoped to draw the Pacific Fleet into a trap – but they would turn the tables on Yamamoto. The hunters would become the hunted.

The two formations Nimitz intended to employ at Midway, Task Force 16 and Task Force 17, made their rendezvous at 15.30 hours on 2 June, about 350 miles northeast of Midway, having refuelled at sea while en route. The combined force, under the command of Rear Admiral Fletcher, moved to the area of operations north of Midway, Task Force 17 operating about ten miles to the southward of Task Force 16.

Task Force 17 contained just the hurriedly-repaired carrier USS *Yorktown*, two heavy cruisers, and five destroyers. *Yorktown*'s aircraft had been bolstered by the addition of squadrons from the carrier USS *Saratoga*, amounting to a total of 36 scout bombers,

"I cut the throttle, threw the plane into a skid, and he over ran me. I raked him with gun fire as he went by."

The moment that Captain Simard committed his long-range B-17 bombers to the battle – a USAAF B-17E Flying Fortress takes-off off from the airfield on Eastern Island, Midway Atoll, to attack the Japanese invasion fleet, 3 June 1942. (USNHHC)

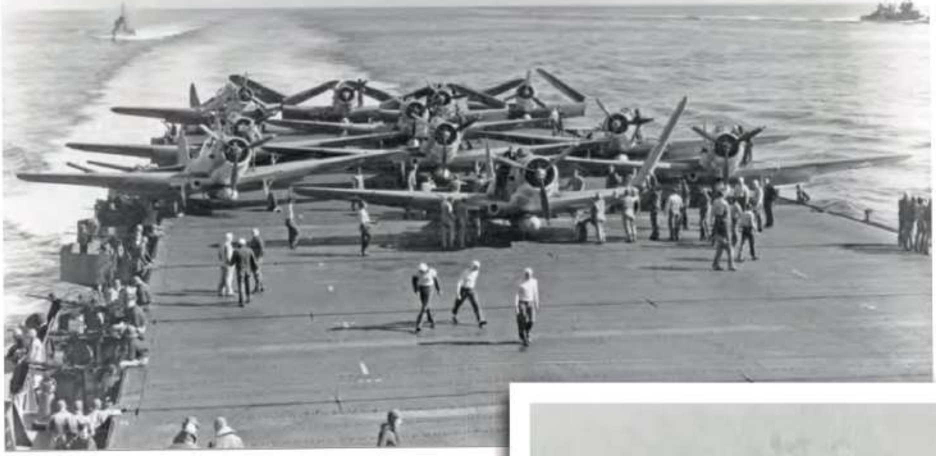
12 torpedo bombers, and 25 fighters. In Task Force 16, both *Enterprise* and *Hornet* carried 35 scout bombers, 14 torpedo bombers, and 27 fighters. The lesson of the Battle of the Coral Sea, when the American fighters were outnumbered at every encounter, had resulted in a 50% increase in the number of fighters carried by each carrier, bringing them to numerical equality with the Japanese, ship for ship.

THE JAPANESE EXPEDITION SAILS

Kido Butai sailed from Hashira Jima in Hiroshima Wan at 09.00 hours on 26 May 1942. Yamamoto's Main Force was around 30 hours behind the Carrier Striking Force but took a shorter route to the area of operations. To protect his main force, at 15.00 hours on 3 June Yamamoto detached a screening force northwards. It played no further part in the campaign, only re-joining the main force after the battle.

Firefighting crews at work in the badly damaged seaplane hangar on Sand Island. (NARA)

Frantic preparations underway on the flight deck of USS *Enterprise* just prior to 07.00 hours on 4 June. The aircraft, Douglas TBD-1 Devastators, are from the US Navy's Torpedo Squadron 6. Eleven of the 14 TBDs launched from *Enterprise* against the Japanese fleet are visible in this photograph. Three more TBDs and ten Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat fighters still need to be pushed into position before launching can begin. The TBD in the left front is Number Two, flown by Ensign Severin L. Rombach and Aviation Radioman 2nd Class W.F. Glenn. Along with eight other VT-6 aircraft, this plane and its crew were lost attacking the Japanese aircraft carriers little more than two hours after the picture was taken. (NARA)



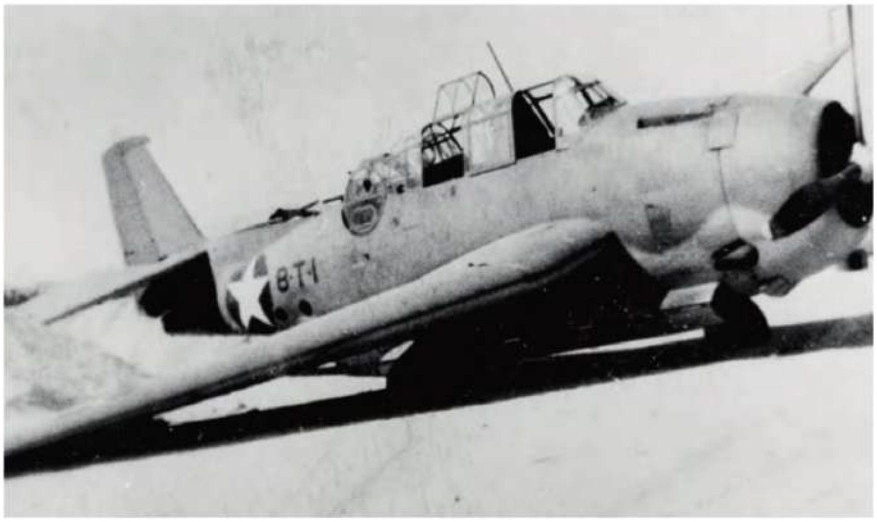
The 2nd Fleet, which was to provide distant cover for the Occupation Force, sailed with the Main Force. It duly steamed southwest until it rendezvoused with the troop transport unit and its close escort, both of which had put to sea earlier.

At the same time, measures were taken by the Americans to strengthen Midway to the maximum extent possible. For long-range search, 30 Navy Consolidated *PBY* Catalinas were despatched to the island, and for long-range strikes 17 Boeing B-17s of the Seventh Air Force and four Army Martin B-26 Marauders fitted with torpedoes were sent to Midway from Hawaii.

Major General C.L. Tinker, Commander of the Army Air Force in Hawaii, went to Midway to assess the situation for himself. As a result, to provide close-in air striking power, the Marine air group was brought up to a strength of 28 fighters and 34 scout bombers, though only 30 pilots were available for the latter. This group was augmented by six new Navy torpedo bombers.

While all the Army and Navy aircraft sent to Midway were under the control of the Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station Midway (Captain C.T. Simard), there was no coordination between the carrier task forces and Midway. This was to ensure that the Japanese had no inkling of the approach or whereabouts of the US ships, which also were to sail in radio silence.

In the belief that the Japanese planned a rendezvous about 700 miles west of Midway, B-17s undertook searches to a distance of 800 miles on 31 May and 1 June, and on 2 June a B-17 without bombs searched 800 miles to the west, but did not make contact



The honour of being the first US Navy aircraft to engage the Japanese fleet on 4 June 1942, fell to six Avengers of VT-8. In the battle that followed, five of the aircraft were shot down. The pilot of the sixth, Ensign Albert Earnest, managed to nurse his badly damaged Avenger, 8-T-1, back to Midway – when this picture was taken. Of the two men in Earnest's crew, Radioman 3rd Class Harrier H. Ferrier survived, whilst Seaman 1st Class Jay D. Manning, who was operating the .50 calibre machine-gun turret, was killed during the combats with Japanese fighters. (USNHHC)

The crew of 1st Lieutenant James 'Jim' Muri's B-26, which made a torpedo attack on a Japanese aircraft carrier during the early morning of 4 June, dropping a torpedo at a range of about 450 yards at a height of 150 feet. The bomber was found to have more than 500 bullet holes when it landed back at Midway. 1st Lieutenant Muri is in the front row, second from left. (USNHHC)

with the enemy. The skies were clear that day, except beyond 300 miles to the north and northwest where visibility was poor – and it was precisely this area of low visibility and fog that concealed the approaching Japanese carrier force for some 30 hours until it came within 650 miles of Midway.

The opening shots of what would prove to be the most decisive battle of the war in the Pacific were about to be fired. Yamamoto thought that he would have three days to take and secure Midway before the Pacific Fleet arrived. But the American aircraft carriers were already lying in wait.

FIRST CONTACT

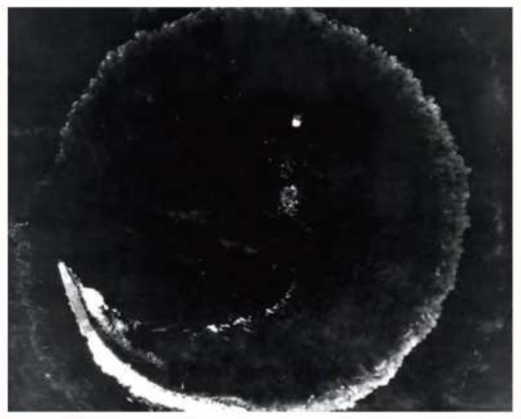
It was on 3 June that the Japanese ships which constituted part of the Midway Occupation Force were first sighted. That morning the aircraft from Midway had set off for their usual search areas, and by 04.30 hours all aircraft fit for service were in the air, in order to clear the runways. As on previous days, the Catalinas flew 700 miles to the northwest. Visibility was good apart from an area of bad weather to the north-northwest, which was by then 400 miles out from Midway.

A few hours later reports began to be received at Midway from the Catalinas, indicating the approach of an enemy surface fleet – it was the ships carrying the Occupation Force. First contact with the transport ships was made at 09.04 hours, the Catalina crew reporting seeing two large cargo ships, though they were in fact minesweepers. Other reported sightings were made, but none of the crews gave any indication of sighting the Japanese aircraft carriers. Captain Simard, for his part, was unwilling to commit the B-17s until he was certain that the Carrier Striking Force was present.

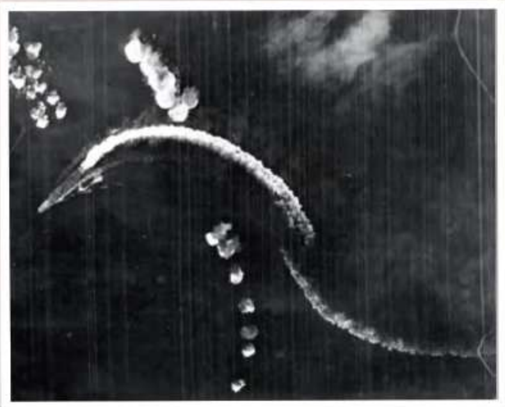
Then, just a little after midday, further reports of a large enemy force consisting of two or three heavy cruisers and about 30 other ships, including destroyers, transports, and cargo vessels, reached Midway. Though the carriers had still not been found, this news was enough for Simard and, at 12.30 hours, the strike force of nine B-17s of the Seventh Air Force was dispatched.

Contact with the enemy warships was made at 16.23 hours. The bombers attacked in three flights of three aircraft each at 8,000, 10,000, and 12,000 feet respectively. Anti-aircraft fire was so heavy that it was considered unwise to stay to observe results. However, a heavy cruiser and a transport were reported to have been hit and a second cruiser was believed to have been struck at the stern. Despite these initial clashes, however, there was no further action that day.

The following morning, Catalinas took off from Midway at 04.15 hours in the hope of spotting the hitherto undetected Japanese

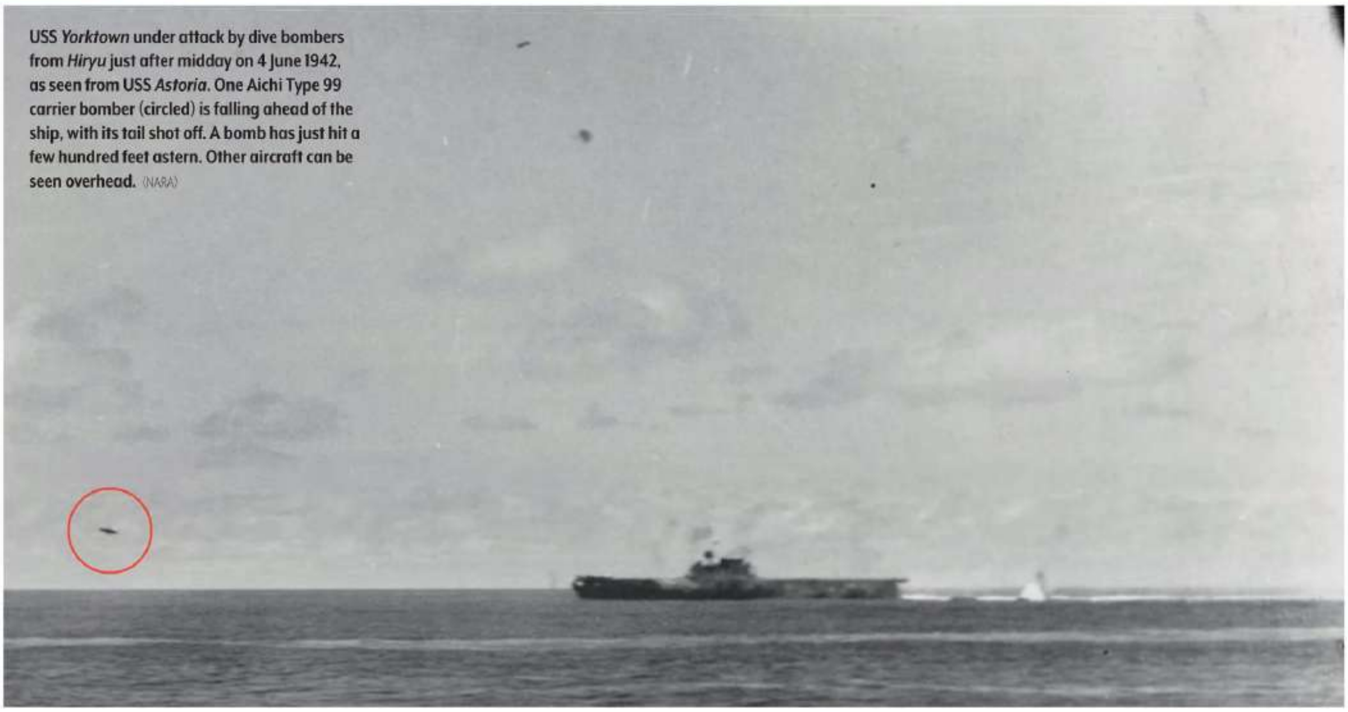


The Japanese aircraft carrier *Soryu* circling while under high-level bombing attack by B-17s shortly after 08.00 hours on 4 June. (USAF)



The Japanese carrier *Hiryu* is seen here manoeuvring to avoid three sticks of bombs dropped during a high-level attack by the B-17s at about 08.12 hours. (USAF)

USS *Enterprise* steaming at high speed at about 07.25 hours on 4 June, as seen from the cruiser USS *Pensacola* after the last of the carrier's Air Group had flown off to engage the enemy. (USNHHC)



USS *Yorktown* under attack by dive bombers from *Hiryu* just after midday on 4 June 1942, as seen from USS *Astoria*. One Aichi Type 99 carrier bomber (circled) is falling ahead of the ship, with its tail shot off. A bomb has just hit a few hundred feet astern. Other aircraft can be seen overhead. (NARA)

carriers. At almost the same time Admiral Nagumo, flying his flag in the carrier *Akagi*, launched his initial attack on Midway to neutralise the island's defences prior to the landing of the Occupation Force. He was completely unaware that the US carrier fleet was in the vicinity.

At 05.55 hours, the air-raid alarm was sounded at Midway, and by 06.00 hours, or shortly after, every aircraft able to leave the ground, except one, was in the air – a total of 126 aircraft, including the Catalinas that had taken off earlier. The 1st, 4th and 5th Divisions of Marine Fighting Squadron 221 (VMF-221), together with eight F2A-3 Brewster Buffalos and six Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat fighters, were vectored towards the approaching enemy formations. The 2nd and 4th Divisions, totalling ten Buffalos, were ordered to orbit ten miles out in case another group of enemy aircraft should appear. Visual contact with the leading Japanese aircraft was made less than 15 minutes later.

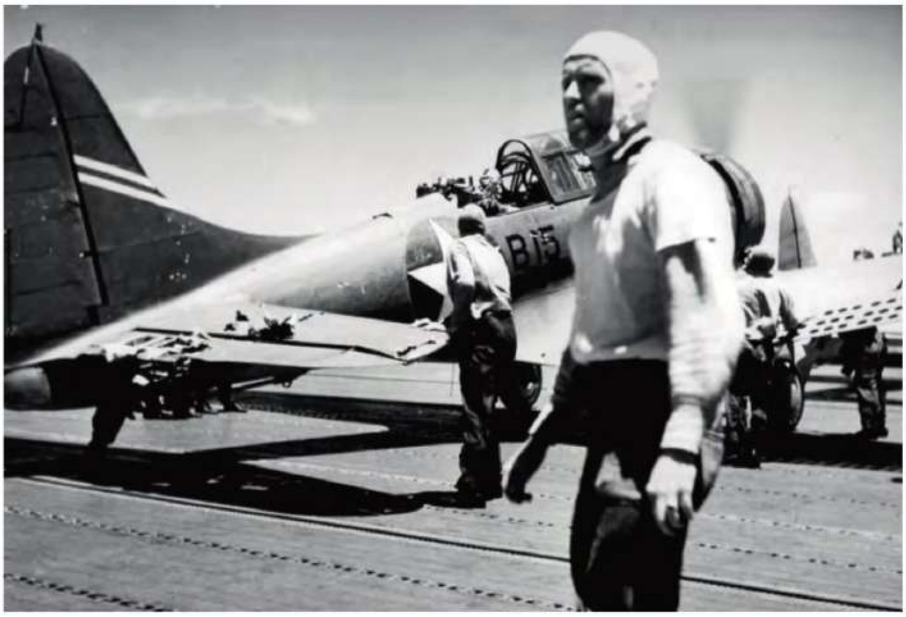
Captain Marion Carl was in one of VMF-221's Wildcats that engaged the Japanese fighters: 'I saw three Zero fighters at a low altitude that were making a wide circle so I came down in a 45 degree dive almost full throttle and had barely enough speed to drop in astern and to the inside of the circle made by one of the Zero fighters. I gave him a long burst, until he fell off on one wing and when last seen was out of control headed almost straight down with smoke streaming from the plane.

'The other two fighters had cut across and were closing on me, so I headed for a cloud. One fighter gave up the pursuit, but the other came on and started firing. He fired steadily for several seconds, but was shooting low, for I could see the tracers going by on both sides and slightly below me. Finally, I felt the impact of bullets striking the plane. He was gaining fast and had followed me through one cloud, so I cut the throttle, threw the plane into a skid, and he over ran me. I raked him with gun fire as he went by. He slid across in front and below me, and I shoved over sharply and pressed the trigger at the same time, but evidently the pushover was too sharp because none of my guns would fire. I dropped down astern the fighter and through a cloud. I saw no enemy plane thereafter.'

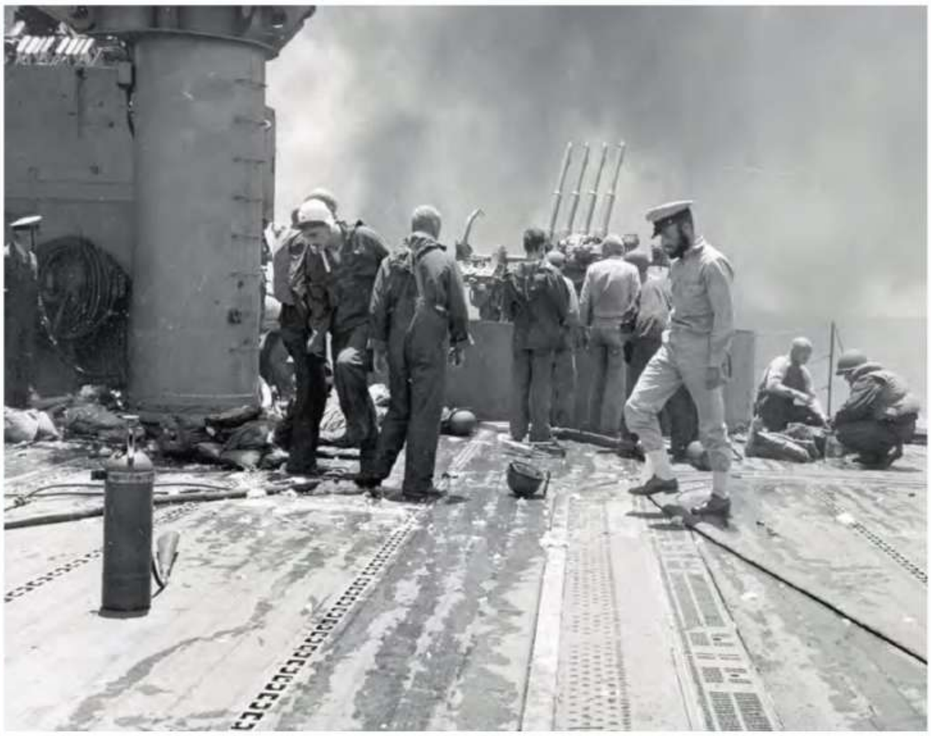
Of the 27 fighters of the Marine air group which intercepted the enemy bombers, 15 were missing and seven severely damaged. It is believed, however, that they brought down at least 43 Japanese aircraft. Many Japanese bombers got through and attacked Midway, but Japanese pilots reported to Nagumo that a second aerial attack on Midway's defences would be necessary if troops were to be able to go ashore.

'THE TERRIFYING SCREAM OF THE DIVE-BOMBERS'

Meanwhile, it was the Americans' turn to attack. At 07.05 hours, four B-26s from Midway and six Marine Avengers made contact with the Japanese carrier force. The Japanese immediately launched all of their Zero fighters. As the B-26s began their run towards the Japanese ships, they were engaged head-on by six Zeros and two of the bombers were shot down. One of those managed to release its torpedo towards a carrier before



At about the same time that the aircraft on *Hiryu* were setting out to attack the US forces, this Douglas SBD-3 Dauntless scout bomber of *Enterprise*'s VB-6, damaged during the attack on *Kaga*, made an emergency landing on USS *Yorktown*, low on fuel, at 11.40 hours on 4 June 1942. Its crew, Ensign George Hale Goldsmith, pilot, and Radioman 1st Class James W. Patterson, Jr., can still be seen in the cockpit. Note the extensive damage to the tail. (USNHHC)

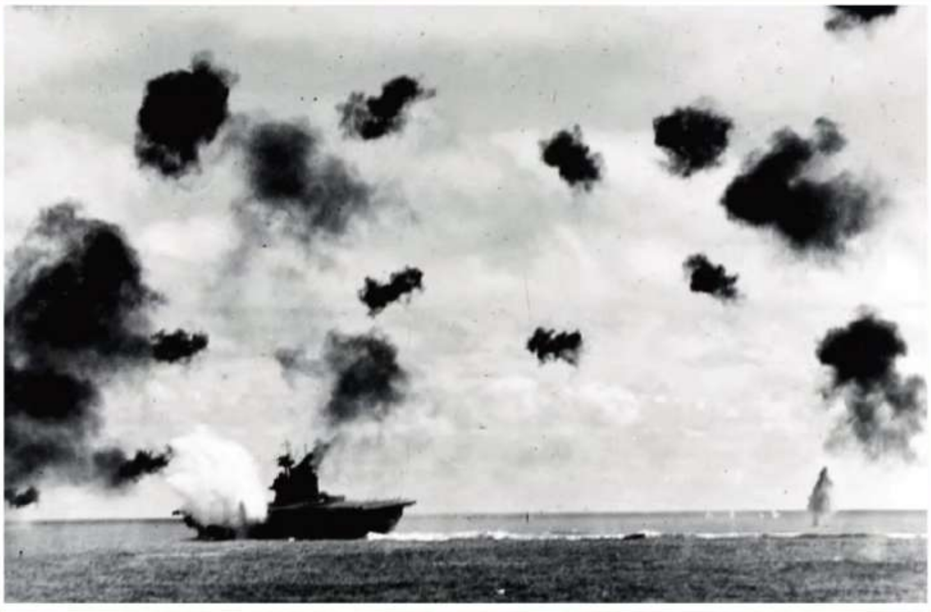


Corpsmen treating casualties on USS *Yorktown* after the carrier had been hit by the bombs at about midday on 4 June 1942. The dead and wounded were members of the crew of the anti-aircraft gun position that can be seen in the centre background. They were struck by fragments from a bomb that exploded on the flight deck just aft of the midships elevator. (NARA)

crashing onto the flight deck and being hurled into the sea. Because of the swarm of some 50 Zeros defending the carrier group, Captain Collins did not loiter to observe the results of his attack, but it was thought that two of the torpedoes had struck the carrier *Hiryu* by the bows. One of only two B-26s that returned from the attack crashed on landing, and both were so badly shot up that they could no longer take part in the battle.

Marine Scout Bombing Squadron 241 (VMSB- 241) from Midway was the next to attack. At 07.55 hours the Marine pilots of the first group sighted their target through broken cloud formations. Below them was Admiral Nagumo's Striking Force of four carriers, battleships, and numerous smaller combatant ships. The marine pilots dived towards the carriers, claiming numerous hits, but in fact achieved nothing more than near misses.

Just one minute after the B-26s' attack, at 07.06 hours, launching of the air groups began on *Enterprise* and *Hornet*, while *Yorktown*'s Air Group was held back in reserve as only two enemy carriers had been spotted by that time and the other two were likely to be somewhere within striking range. As the SBDs spiralled down, they began receiving violent attacks from the Japanese fighters and heavy anti-aircraft fire began to thicken the air. Such was the effect of *Akagi*'s evasive action, none of the bombs found their target.



A fatal hit for USS *Yorktown*. Taken from USS *Pensacola*, this image captures the very moment that *Yorktown* heels over as a second torpedo strikes her amidships. (USNHHC)

The American assault continued, with the B-17s of Flight 92 being the next to strike the Japanese carriers. This group of 15 aircraft had cleared Midway about 04.15 hours, shortly after the patrol planes had been sent out. They were proceeding to the west to attack the enemy forces sighted the preceding day when a message was received in plain language informing them of the discovery of the enemy carrier force on a bearing of 325 degrees from Midway.

Climbing to 20,000 feet, the Fortresses changed course to find the carriers. The enemy force was located at 07.32 hours, but the carriers, circling under a cloud formation, were not found till 08.10 hours. The B-17s had skirted the fleet and approached from the northwest; i.e., from the stern of the targets. They attacked by flights, two elements concentrating on each of two carriers and a single element on a third. Anti-aircraft fire was heavy and soon found the altitude, but was generally behind the attackers. The Japanese fighters did not press home their attacks, which were ineffectual. The results of this attack were reported to be three hits on two carriers. Probably two of these hits were on *Soryu*.

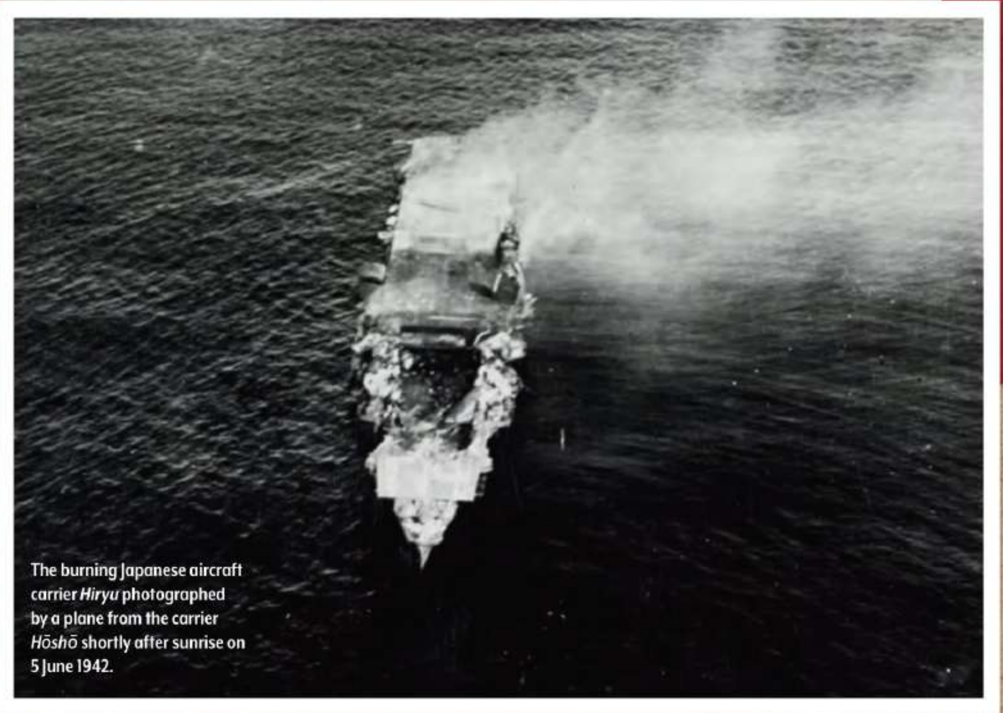
One of the bombs dropped on *Yorktown* by the Japanese bombers, from an aircraft which had been shot to pieces by anti-aircraft fire, exploded on the flight deck. Here we see hurried repairs underway on the hole that the bomb made. (USNHHC)

While Nagumo's fighters were attempting to fend off the American bombers, the Japanese admiral had to consider his next move, still blissfully unaware of presence of the US carriers. Nagumo decided to conduct a second attack upon Midway, satisfied that, as predicted, there was no enemy surface force for him to worry about.

But then a report came in from a pilot of a reconnaissance aircraft that he had sighted what appeared to be an enemy force of ten surface ships about 240 miles from Midway. The pilot was asked to confirm what type of ships the force consisted of. It was 30 minutes before a reply was received: 'Enemy is composed of five cruisers and five destroyers.' This was followed at 08.20 hours with the astonishing information that, 'The enemy is accompanied by what appears to be a carrier.' This carrier was USS *Yorktown*. This information changed everything. Here was a chance to sink an American carrier!

There was no time to lose, and one after another, planes were hoisted from *Akagi*'s hangar and quickly parked on the flight deck. Soon, all the aircraft were warming up their engines. At 10.20 hours the admiral gave the order to launch. But then out of the clouds came *Enterprise*'s and *Yorktown*'s bomber groups, to begin the series of attacks that would change the course of the war in the Pacific.

Watching in dismay as the American bombers sped towards *Akagi* was Captain Mitsuo Fuchida: 'The terrifying scream of the dive-bombers reached me first, followed by the crashing explosion of a direct hit. There was a blinding flash and then a second explosion, much louder than the first ... Looking about, I was horrified at the destruction that had been wrought in a matter of seconds. There was a huge hole in the flight deck just behind the amidship elevator. The elevator itself, twisted like molten glass, was dropping into the hangar. Deck plates reeled upwards in grotesque configurations, planes stood tail up, belching livid flame and jet-black smoke.'[3]


The burning Japanese aircraft carrier *Hiryu* photographed by a plane from the carrier *Hōshō* shortly after sunrise on 5 June 1942.

A Type 97 Nakajima B5N shipboard attack aircraft (upper right) targets *Yorktown* during the mid-afternoon torpedo attack by *Hiryu*'s force on 4 June 1942. The picture was taken from above the carrier's signal station, immediately aft of her tripod foremast. (USNHHC)

The fires quickly spread and ignited fuel and ammunition stores which exploded, shaking the ship from bow to stern and filling the air with deadly metal splinters. The fire continued to rush along the flight deck engulfing the aircraft and detonating their torpedoes. In the course of just five minutes *Akagi* had been turned into a raging inferno.

Soryu had received three direct hits. One of the bombs penetrated to the lower hangar deck amidships, whilst the other two exploded in the upper hangar deck fore and aft. The hangars contained armed and fuelled aircraft, resulting in secondary explosions which ruptured the steam pipes in the boiler rooms. Within a very short time the fires on the ship were out of control. At 10.40 hours Soryu stopped, her crew being ordered to abandon ship five minutes later.

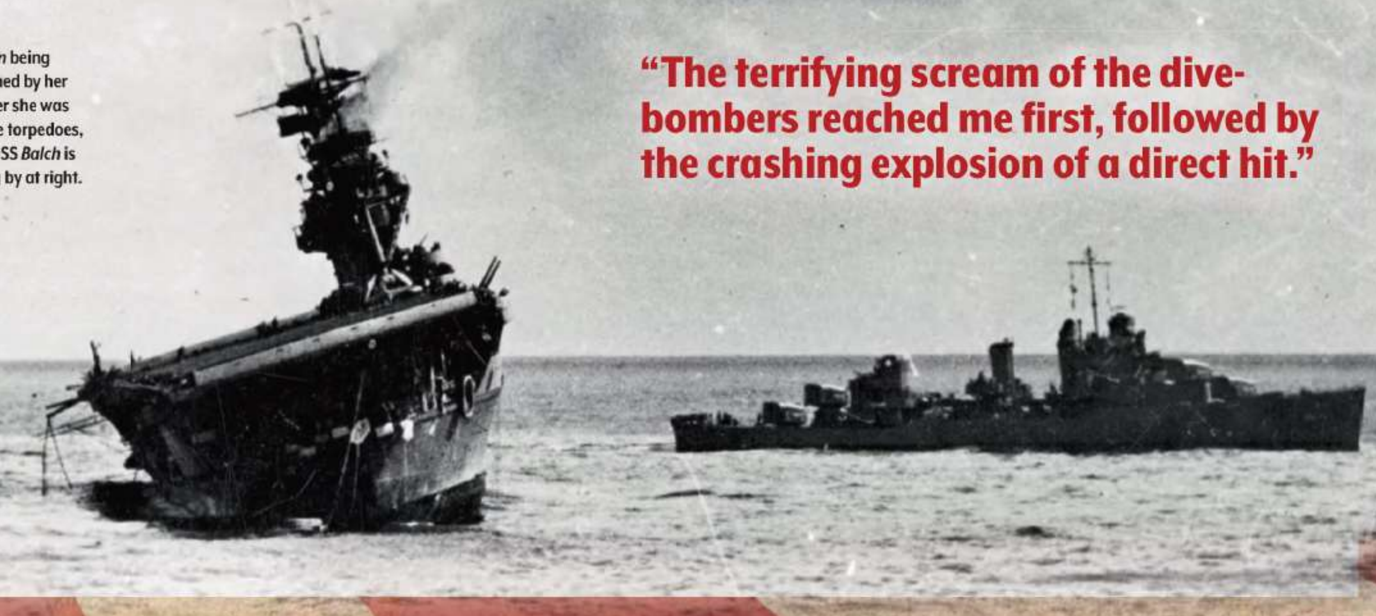
USS *Enterprise*'s Air Group attacked *Kaga*. Her Captain, Jisaku Okada, manoeuvred his ship skilfully but three bombs nevertheless hit the Japanese carrier. The last of those bombs almost completely destroyed the bridge, killing everyone there – including Captain Okada. Fires broke out, and these rapidly spread through the ship. Despite the efforts of its crew, it was clearly obvious that the carrier was also doomed.

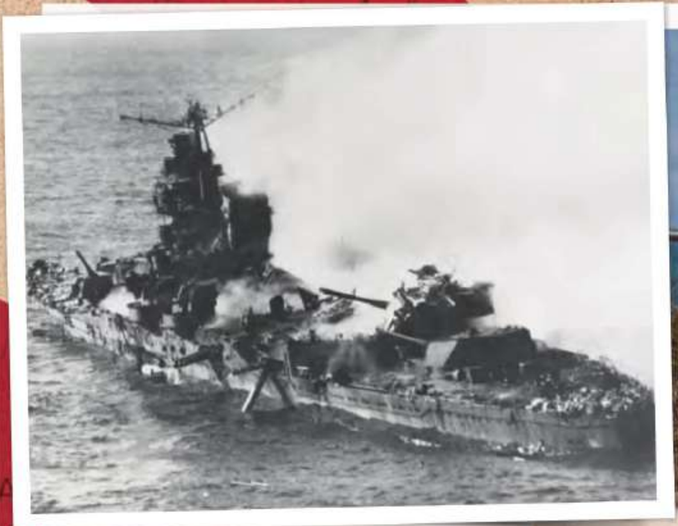
THE LOSS OF YORKTOWN

One of the Japanese carriers, *Hiryu*, remained undamaged and had been able to launch its aircraft. The Americans were not going to have it all their own way.

At 11.59 hours, the approaching Japanese bombers were detected. Six Grumman Wildcats of *Yorktown*'s Fighting Squadron Three, which were on patrol, had just been relived and were on deck, as were the fighters

"The terrifying scream of the dive-bombers reached me first, followed by the crashing explosion of a direct hit."


Yorktown being abandoned by her crew after she was hit by the torpedoes, 4 June. USS *Balch* is standing by at right. (USNHHC)



The battered heavy cruiser *Mikuma* photographed by the crew of a Dauntless from USS *Enterprise*. Note her shattered midships structure, torpedo dangling from the after port-side tubes and wreckage atop her number four eight-inch gun turret. *Mikuma* rolled to port and sank during the night of 6/7 June, taking 650 men with it to the bottom. (USNHHC)

The Midway Monument is located on Midway Atoll at the northwestern portion of the Hawaiian island chain. Erected in August 2015, the inscription on the memorial ends with these words: 'After the Battle of Midway, the United States and its Allies forged ahead with ever increasing strength and confidence to final victory, securing the blessings of freedom and liberty for generations yet unborn.' (American Battle Monuments Commission)

which had returned from the attack upon the Japanese carriers and were in the process of being refuelled. All the fighters were ordered into the air to intercept the attackers.

Only seven or eight of the Japanese bombers broke through the Wildcats, but three of their bombs hit *Yorktown*. One of the bombs detonated on the flight deck just aft of the midships elevator, sending fragments into the hangar and setting fires that were quickly extinguished. Another of the bombs landed in the forward lift well, starting fires adjacent to the forward aviation fuel tanks, while the other punctured *Yorktown*'s uptakes and knocked out the boilers, causing her to lose power and glide to a dead halt in the water. However, at 14.12 hours the boilers were re-lit and, though two were disabled, the carrier was able to make 20 knots.

Less than 30 minutes later, at 14.41 hours, the second wave of aircraft from *Hiryu* commenced their attack upon *Yorktown*. Though the Japanese reported that all nine of its aircraft dropped their Type 91 aerial torpedoes, only four were seen to enter the water. *Yorktown* avoided two torpedoes which crossed her bow, but the last two, released at about 800 yards, struck her on the port side amidships, the first at 14.45 hours and the second thirty seconds later. The carrier lost all power and began to list to port. Captain Elliott Buckmaster had no choice but to abandon ship. As it happened, *Yorktown* remained afloat until 7 June when she rolled over and sank stern first.

Though *Hiryu* had escaped the US bombers so far, she would not survive the day. At 15.30 hours, *Enterprise* began launching an attack group of 11 of her own scout bombers along with 14 that had transferred from *Yorktown*. The bombers spotted the enemy at 16.50 hours and launched their attack 15 minutes later, diving down out of the sun from 19,000 feet. They were engaged by fighters from *Hiryu* which shot down one of the bombers before it began its dive and another two as they pulled away after unleashing their bombs. Nevertheless, four bombs struck the Japanese carrier, rendering *Hiryu* a mass of flames.

All four Japanese carriers had been destroyed, as was the heavy cruiser *Mikuma*, which was sunk two days later. Though *Yorktown* had been lost, Yamamoto's Carrier Striking Force was no more; all 248 of its aircraft had gone to the bottom with their ships.

After the attack of 7 December 1941, the destruction of so many American ships had left the Japanese with the largest naval force in the Pacific. But that advantage had been blown away in just a few devastating minutes on 4 June 1942.

The Battle of Midway was the first major US naval victory over the Japanese and has, quite justifiably, been called the turning point in the war in the Pacific. It gave Admiral Nimitz the freedom to mount operations against Japanese-held territory, the first demonstration of this being the Guadalcanal campaign, the first important Allied offensive in the Pacific theatre, which began just two months after Midway.

NOTES

1. Robert O'Neil (Ed.), *The Pacific War From Pearl Harbor to Okinawa* (Osprey, Oxford, 2015), p.67.
2. Edwin T. Layton, Roger Pineau, and John Costello, *And I Was There, Pearl Harbor and Midway – Breaking the Secrets* (William Morrow and Company, New York, 1985), p.422.
3. Mitsuo Fuchiada and Masatake Okumiya, *Midway, the Battle that Doomed Japan* (Hutchinson, London, 1957), pp.180-1.

At 07.01 hours on 7 June USS *Yorktown* turned over onto her port side, rolled upside-down, and sank, stern first, in 3,000 fathoms of water. Here the final dramatic moments of *Yorktown* have been captured by a crewman from an accompanying destroyer. This view looking aft has the carrier's forefoot in the centre foreground and the forward end of her flight deck in the right centre. Note the froth caused by air escaping from the hull. (USNHHC)

Allied ships pictured leaving Wellington, New Zealand, on 22 July 1942, en route to take part in the invasion of Guadalcanal and Tulagi. Photographed looking aft from USS *Chicago*, the next ship astern is USS *Salt Lake City*, which is being followed by the light cruiser HMAS *Hobart*. A Curtiss SOC Seagull floatplane is in the foreground. (USNHHC)

GUADALCANAL

Eight months after the Japanese had struck their initial blow at Pearl Harbor, the United States Navy and Marine Corps undertook their first amphibious offensive operation of the war in the Pacific.

Japanese successes in 1941 and early 1942, had seen efforts to cut communications between America and two of its allies, Australia and New Zealand. In these operations, Japanese forces had seized territory in the British Solomon Islands. At the very tip of the enemy's line of advance down the Solomons lay the British port of Tulagi and the then little-known island of Guadalcanal.

The Japanese seized Tulagi, with its superb harbour, on 4 May 1942, but as they advanced to Port Moresby, they found, to their surprise, their warships being attacked by US aircraft. Now aware that American carriers were in the area, the Japanese sought out the US fleet in the Coral Sea. In the ensuing battle, as we know, the Japanese lost heavily.

Nevertheless, the Japanese were in possession of the Solomons and they quickly began to create a naval refuelling, communications, and seaplane reconnaissance base at Tulagi. At the same time, work began on the construction of a large airfield at Lunga Point on Guadalcanal. The threat these bases posed to the United States' communications with Australia, which was the Allies' key supply, logistics and assembly point in the southern Pacific, was starkly obvious. To the Japanese, retention of these bases, particularly that on Guadalcanal, was 'the fork in the road which leads to victory for them [the Allies] or us'. There was little doubt that Guadalcanal would be the target of the first Allied offensive in the war in the Pacific.

OPERATION WATCHTOWER

On 25 June 1942, Admiral King, Commander in Chief United States Fleet, issued the instructions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that an offensive was to be launched against the enemy forces in the Solomons. Santa Cruz Island was to be seized and occupied, as were Tulagi and adjacent areas. Permanent occupation forces would be drawn from the Australian Army. The target date was about 1 August. The attack upon Tulagi and Guadalcanal was Task 1, which was eventually given the codename Operation *Watchtower*.

For this operation, the troops available were the 1st and 2nd US Marine divisions, plus the men of the 23rd and 25th US Army infantry divisions. Naval support, assembled as Task Force 61 under the command of Vice

Admiral Frank Fletcher, came in the form of three fleet carriers, one fast battleship, nine heavy cruisers, two anti-aircraft light cruisers and 31 destroyers, plus two Royal Australian Navy heavy cruisers and one light cruiser. With the necessary troop transports and other support vessels, the entire force of 75 warships departed Fiji on 31 July. Their destination was Guadalcanal.

On the morning of Friday, 7 August 1942, eight months to the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, American troops began the reconquest of the territory the Japanese had seized in those intervening months. The Task Force split into two, with one part heading for Tulagi and the other, the larger of the two, for Guadalcanal. It was off Guadalcanal's Lunga Point that the heavy cruiser USS *Quincy* opened the campaign with a salvo from its 8-inch guns, the target being suspected Japanese coastal batteries. Other warships soon added to the barrage, while F4F-4 Wildcats from the carrier USS *Wasp* attacked, and destroyed, all seven Kawanishi H6K4 flying boats and all eight Nakajima A6M2-N float planes of the Yokohama Air Group moored off Halavo.

US Marine Corps LVT(1) amphibious tractors pictured on the quayside at Wellington, New Zealand, on 20 July 1942, whilst waiting to be loaded onto the ships of the Guadalcanal-Tulagi invasion force. The ship on the left in the background is the attack transport USS *McCawley*. (USNHHC)

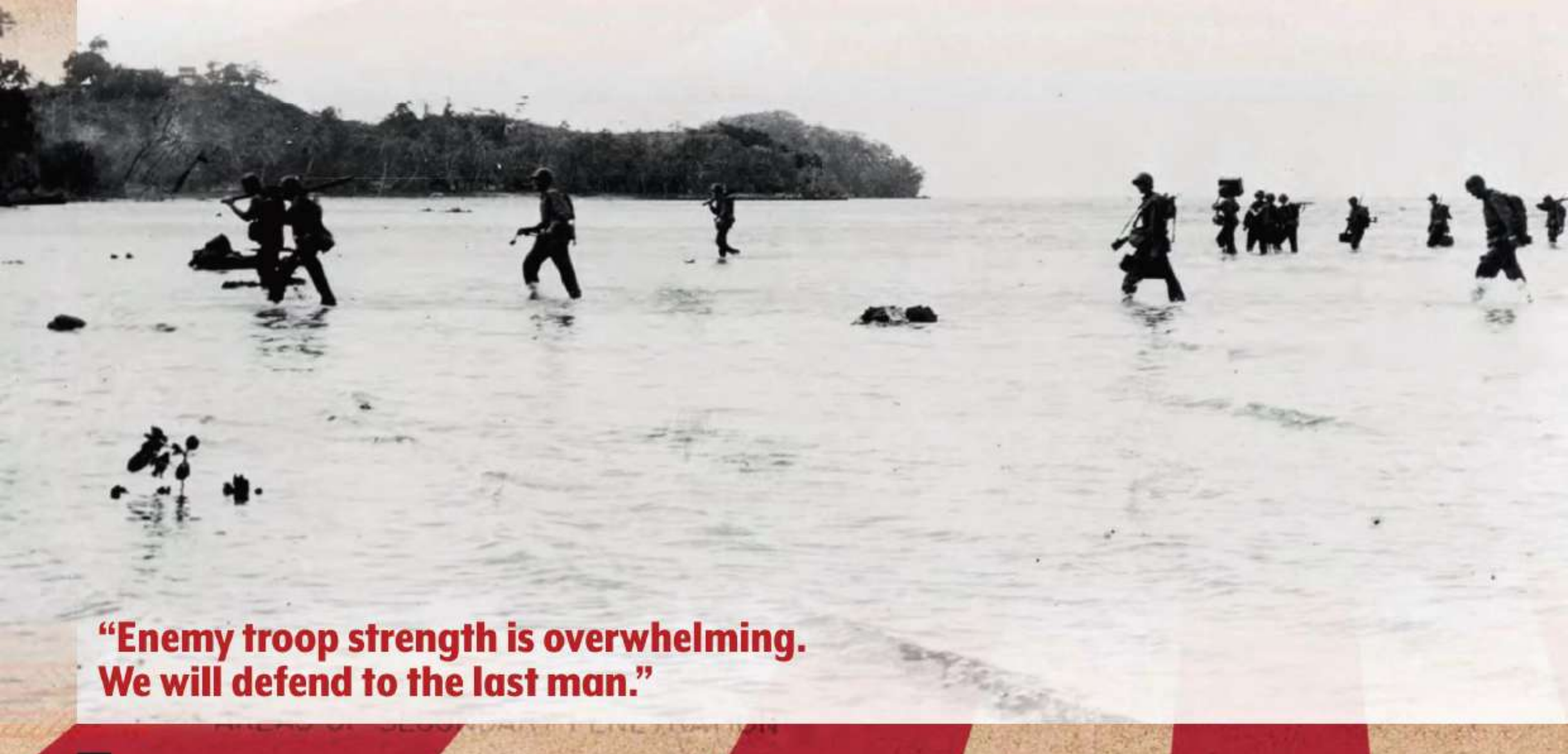
Personnel of Scouting Squadron Six (VS-6) load a 500lb bomb on to a *Douglas SBD Dauntless* on the flight deck of USS *Enterprise* during the first day of strikes on Guadalcanal and Tulagi, 7 August 1942. (NARA)

H-Hour was set at 09.10 hours on the 7th. It was thought that there were 5,000 Japanese troops on Guadalcanal and that most of these defenders were based at Lunga Point airfield, with a detachment near Koli Point where they were building another airfield.

The landing craft that would carry the Marines to the shore were duly swung out from the ships, quickly loaded with men and soon speeding to the beaches. General Alexander Vandegrift USMC planned to land his men on the strip of white sand designated Red Beach.

The first ashore, right on schedule, was the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. Their landing was unopposed. The 11,000 US Marines who landed could rightly expect that they would quickly subdue the enemy and by 18.00 hours on 8 August, they had captured the airfield at

US Marines come ashore on Tulagi Island during the landings there in August 1942. (US Navy)



"Enemy troop strength is overwhelming. We will defend to the last man."

Luga Point, the Japanese construction workers disappearing inland. The only opposition had come from Japanese naval aircraft based at Rabaul, which attacked the invasion armada, setting one transport on fire, which sank two days later, and severely damaging the destroyer USS *Jarvis*.

TO THE LAST MAN

The landings at Tulagi, though on a much smaller scale, proved far more difficult for the two battalions of Marines. The Japanese commander of the communication base at Tulagi had immediately notified the Commanding Officer of the 25th Air Flotilla at Rabaul, on the island of New Britain in Papua New Guinea, some 660 miles from Guadalcanal, that he was under attack. The final words of his message were: 'Enemy troop strength is overwhelming. We will defend to the last man.' And that was exactly what they did.

US Marine Corps LVT(1) amphibious tractors make for the shore during the American landings at Guadalcanal on 7 August 1942. (NARA)

A US Marine Corps M2A4 Stuart light tank is hoisted from the attack cargo ship USS *Alchiba* into a landing craft, off the Guadalcanal invasion beaches, on 7 August 1942. (USNHHC)

The Japanese soldiers pulled back to high ground, and it was not until nightfall on the 8th that all Japanese resistance had ended and Tulagi was declared secured. This victory had been made at the cost of more than 300 casualties. All bar twenty of the almost 900 Japanese defenders were killed. In these operations, the island of Gavut was also retaken.

AMERICA'S WORST NAVAL DEFEAT

The Soloman Islands had been taken from the Japanese with comparatively little loss, though some of their troops were still present on Guadalcanal having escaped across the River Matanikau. But that was not to be the end of the fighting.

The attacks on the US ships by Japanese aircraft were a great concern to Admiral Fletcher and with the ground forces in control of the land, he saw no need to expose his precious carriers to any further danger. Fletcher therefore withdrew them, leaving Admiral Kelly Turner with six heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and 15 destroyers to support the ground operations.

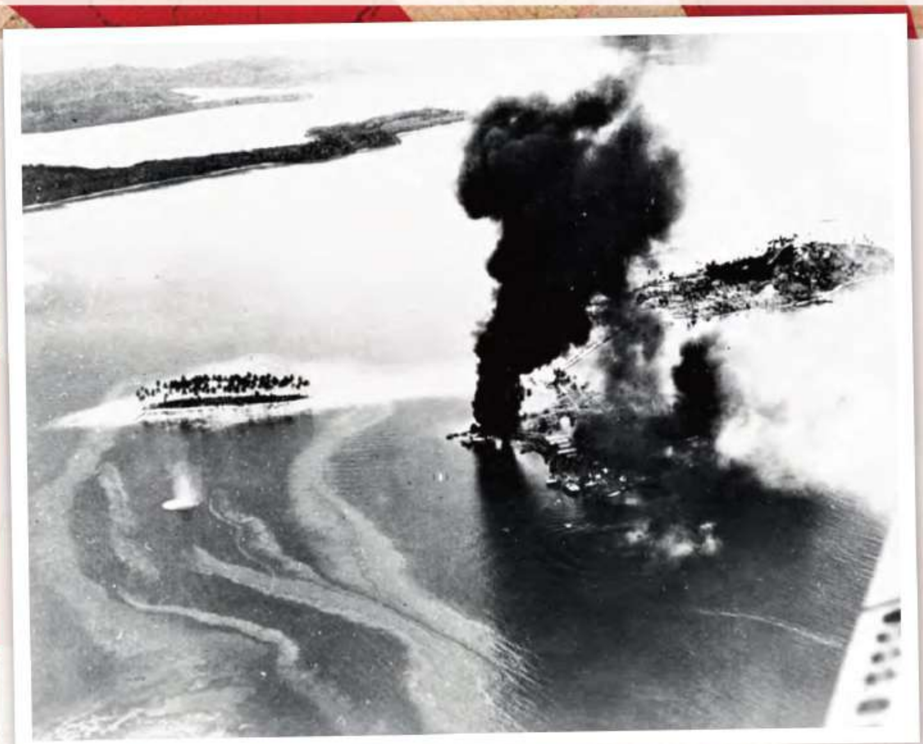
The Japanese, for their part, were determined to regain control of the Solomons, and a force of five heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and a single destroyer set out to challenge the Americans. It was on the night of 8/9 August that Admiral Gunichi Mikawa struck in what has become known as the Battle of Savo Island.

The Americans had not undergone any serious training for fighting at night – but the Japanese had. The night was moonless, the sky overcast, and rain began to fall. Mikawa's Striking Force passed through Turner's destroyer picket line unseen. At 01.33 hours on 9 August, Mikawa issued the order, 'All ships attack'.

Ten minutes later the stillness of the night was shattered by the 8-inch guns of the Japanese flagship, the heavy cruiser *Chōkai*. What followed next was nothing less than slaughter. In less than an hour, three of Turner's heavy cruisers had been sunk or were sinking, including the USS *Quincy* which was hit towards the end of the engagement by shells from three Japanese ships.

Lieutenant Commander John Andrew was *Quincy*'s assistant gunnery officer: 'When I reached the bridge level, I found it a shambles of dead bodies, with only three or four people still standing. In the Pilot House itself the only person standing was the signalman at the wheel who was vainly endeavouring to check the ship's swing to starboard to bring her to

Landing craft underway off Red Beach on Guadalcanal as US Marines go ashore to capture the Lunga Point area and its airfield from the Japanese. The airfield, later re-named Henderson Field, is out of view to the right. (USNHHC)



Taken from an SBD aircraft operating from one of the US Navy carriers, this picture shows Japanese facilities burning on Tanambogo Island, east of Tulagi, on 7 August 1942. (USNHHC)

port. On questioning him I found out that the Captain, who at that time was laying [*sic*] near the wheel, had instructed him to beach the ship and he was trying to head for Savo Island, distant some four miles (6 km) on the port quarter.

'I stepped to the port side of the Pilot House and looked out to find the island and noted that the ship was heeling rapidly to port, sinking by the bow. At that instant the Captain straightened up and fell back, apparently dead, without having uttered any sound other than a moan.'[1]

One US Navy assessment of the events that night states the following: 'The Allied surface forces were caught unaware and routed, losing one Australian and three American cruisers. Allied dead totaled 1,023; 709 personnel were wounded. The Japanese only suffered light damage. The battle has come to be identified as the worst defeat in a single fleet action suffered by the United States Navy.'

As the report goes on to reveal, things might have been even worse: 'If the Japanese commander, Vice Admiral Mikawa Gunichi, had also elected to destroy the Allied transports before returning to his task force's bases, the campaign of Guadalcanal – and possibly the next phase of the Pacific War – might have evolved differently.'

BATTLE OF THE EASTERN SOLOMONS

Following the withdrawal of Fletcher's carriers and the destruction of Turner's force, the Marines on Guadalcanal were left with little support and very limited stocks of food. General Vandegrift, therefore, decided that emphasis would be placed on the defence of Lunga Point and its environs, including the all-important airfield, and to await any Japanese counter-attack.

The task of re-taking the Solomons fell to the 17th Army under the command of Lieutenant General Harukichi Hyakutake which was based at Rabaul in Papua New Guinea. Hyakutake was to be supported by Yamamoto's Combined Fleet. The 17th Army was widely dispersed at that time but rather than concentrating all his strength before launching his attack, the various units began making their way towards Guadalcanal independently.

The first to arrive were men of the 28th Infantry Regiment, which landed on 19 August. Two days later it attacked

US Marines rest in the jungle on Guadalcanal during the fighting in August 1942. (NARA)

Japanese Mitsubishi G4M Betty bombers fly low through anti-aircraft gunfire during a torpedo attack on Allied ships between Guadalcanal and Tulagi on the morning of 8 August 1942. These aircraft were being flown without bomb-bay doors. (USNHHC)

"At that instant the Captain straightened up and fell back, apparently dead, without having uttered any sound other."

US Marines race to construct front line defences at Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, after the landings in 1942. (USNHHC)

Captain Warren Frederick Martin Clemens, of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate Defence Force, pictured with six members of the BSIPDF Scouts on Guadalcanal after the American landings. Clemens, the British Colonial Service District Officer on Guadalcanal, had remained on the island throughout its May-August 1942 occupation by the Japanese. (NARA)

the Marines at what became known as the Battle of the Tenaru. The Japanese had underestimated the strength of the American forces on the island and almost all of the 917 men were killed or captured. This premature action would have unforeseen consequences for the Japanese. When Fletcher heard of the enemy attack, he moved his carrier force closer to the Solomons in case of further larger-scale attempts to retake the islands. The effects of that move will be seen shortly.

Having beaten off the first Japanese attempt at retaking Guadalcanal, US troops concentrated on finishing the airfield at Lunga Point. Renamed Henderson Field, it was completed and ready to receive aircraft on 18 August; Admiral Fletcher began the delivery of aircraft from his carriers and both fighter and bomber aircraft began to arrive.

The bulk of the Japanese re-invasion force, however, was bearing down on the Solomons. But Fletcher, as we have seen, had returned to the area and was prepared to face an assault. On the morning of 23 August, a PBY Catalina flying boat spotted the Japanese fleet. The next day the opposing forces unleashed their aircraft in the third all-carrier battle of the war in the Pacific.

The Japanese were the first to attack, launching a heavy raid on Henderson Field. The air group from USS *Saratoga* then located and attacked the light cruiser *Ryujo*, scoring just a single hit. A Japanese patrol aircraft, however, then spotted the US carriers. Admiral Nagumo saw his chance to avenge Midway and ordered the strike force from his fleet carriers *Shōkaku* and *Zuikaku* to attack. But instead of inflicting a heavy blow on the American ships, the Japanese lost so many aircraft that their efforts to retake Guadalcanal were fatally compromised.

The approach of 36 dive bombers, 12 torpedo bombers and 27 Zero fighters was picked up by US *Enterprise*'s radar at 17.09 hours and a combined force of 50 Wildcats took to the air from *Enterprise* and *Saratoga*. Little more than half the Japanese bombers broke through the US fighters; those that did aimed for *Enterprise*.

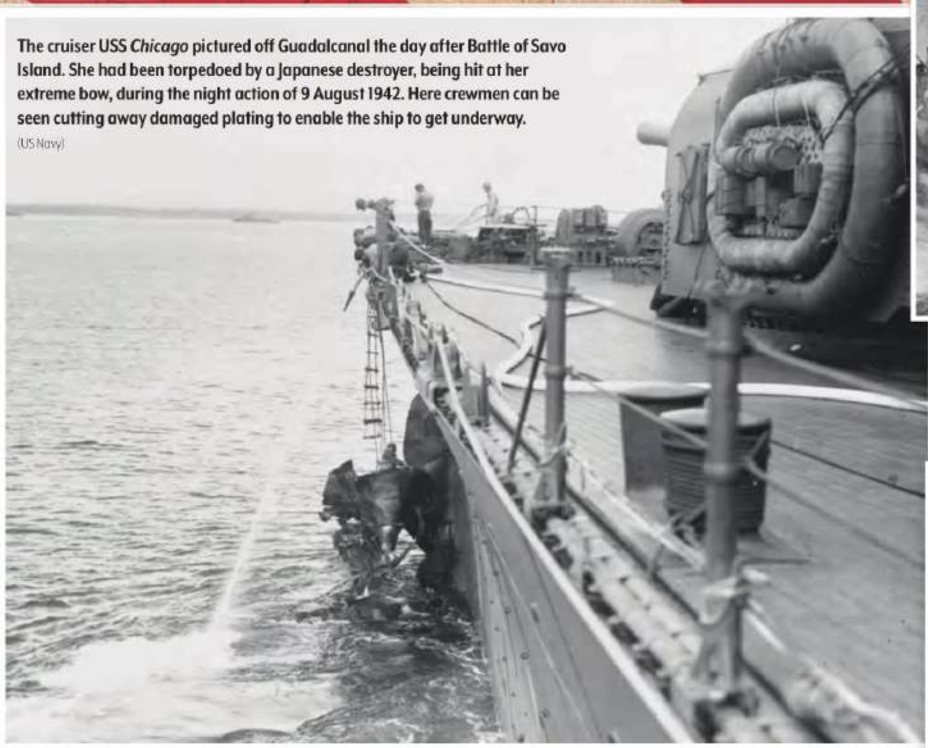
For the next four minutes there was an almost continuous roar of aircraft diving on the carrier. But the volume of anti-aircraft fire from *Enterprise* and its escorts was so intense that three dive bombers disintegrated in the air, others pulled out of their dives or were so jolted by the bursting shells they were thrown off their aim or jettisoned their bombs. Nevertheless, *Enterprise* took three hits, though none proved too serious. About ten Japanese aircraft also tried to attack the cruiser USS *North Carolina*, only to be met by a barrage of anti-aircraft fire which made the warship appear 'to be ablaze throughout'. Though the Japanese carriers had not been located or attacked, they had lost 75 aircraft and 290 invaluable aircrew. The Japanese attempt at retaking Guadalcanal had been thwarted, albeit only temporarily.

USS *Quincy* photographed from a Japanese cruiser during the Battle of Savo Island, off Guadalcanal, on 9 August 1942. *Quincy*, seen here illuminated by Japanese searchlights and on fire, was sunk in this action. (USNHHC)

BLOODY RIDGE

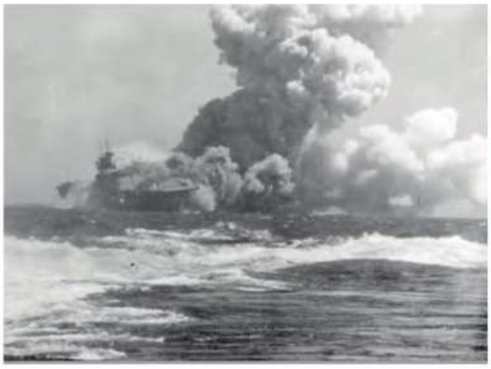
The frenzied action at sea was matched by equally fierce fighting ashore. Japanese destroyers had delivered elements of Colonel Kiyonao Ichiki's 28 Infantry Regiment to conduct a night attack upon the US Marine's positions on the east side of the Lunga perimeter. However, the Japanese had once again seriously underestimated the strength of the Marine force on the island.

At 01.30 hours on 21 August, Ichiki's troops stormed the Marines' lines in a screaming attack which was met by the calculated fire of the defenders who had been warned of Ichiki's presence on the island.



The cruiser USS *Chicago* pictured off Guadalcanal the day after Battle of Savo Island. She had been torpedoed by a Japanese destroyer, being hit at her extreme bow, during the night action of 9 August 1942. Here crewmen can be seen cutting away damaged plating to enable the ship to get underway. (US Navy)

A dramatic photograph that captured the moment that a Japanese bomb exploded on the flight deck of USS *Enterprise*, just aft of the island, during the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, the third carrier battle of the Pacific campaign, on 24 August 1942. (NARA)



USS *Wasp* pictured, from USS *San Francisco*, afire and sinking south of San Cristobal Island after being torpedoed by a Japanese submarine, 15 September 1942. (NARA)

The Japanese were cut to pieces and Ichiki, disgraced by his defeat, burned his regimental colours and shot himself.

Throughout August, the Americans consolidated their hold on Guadalcanal and built up their aerial forces on the island, as well as sending reinforcements to join Vandegrift's Marines. The Japanese, for their part, remained determined to eject the Americans. Attacks on Henderson Field, undertaken by bombers and fighters from Rabaul, occurred on an almost daily basis, whilst a much larger expeditionary force was despatched from Truk island to take back control of Guadalcanal. This took the form of the 5,000 men of Major General Kiyotake Kawaguchi's 35th Infantry Brigade and another 1,000 men under Colonel Oka.

Vandegrift correctly assumed that the Japanese would aim their assault upon Henderson Field. He believed that they would move along a narrow grassy coral ridge, then known as Lunga Ridge, but which would soon be renamed after the commander of the 1st Marine Raider Battalion, Colonel Merritt A. Edson, whose men were posted there on 11 September – in the very nick of time, for Kawaguchi was about to strike.

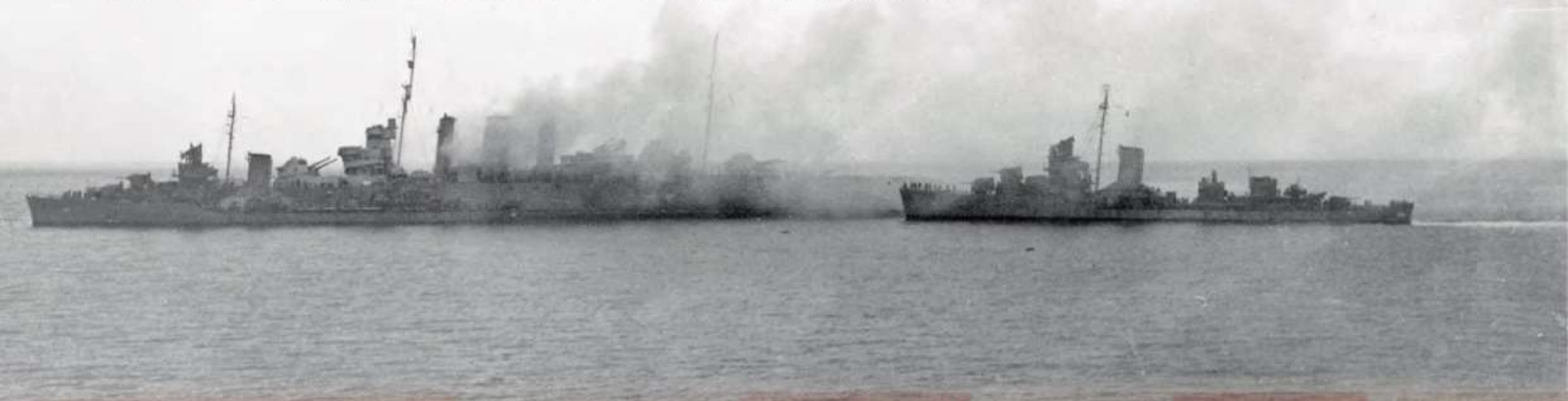
At 21.00 hours that same day, four Japanese warships shelled 'Edson's' ridge. Then, in the early hours of 12 September, Kawaguchi's troops began their first attack to probe the Marines' positions, without success. The following night, the Japanese renewed their attack in the form of a frontal infantry assault. Again, the attack was preceded by naval gunfire and Japanese aircraft dropped 500lb bombs all along the ridge.

The first Japanese thrust was against Edson's left flank. Boiling out of the jungle, the enemy soldiers attacked fearlessly into the face of rifle and machine-gun fire, soon closing to bayonet range. But the Marines held their ground and the attack was beaten back. The Japanese came again and again to offer up their lives for Emperor Hirohito, each time being beaten back by the firepower their determination was supposed to overcome.

The next night, they attacked yet again with renewed fury. 'The Japanese were everywhere,' notes one author, 'fighting hand-to-hand in the Marines' foxholes and gun pits and filtering past forward positions to attack from the rear … The man-to-man battles lapped over into the jungle on either flank of the ridge, and engineer and pioneer positions were attacked.

"Boiling out of the jungle, the enemy soldiers attacked fearlessly into the face of rifle and machine-gun fire, soon closing to bayonet range."

US destroyers rescue some of the crew of the fatally damaged HMAS *Canberra* following the Battle of Savo Island. This picture was taken off the coast of Guadalcanal at about 06.30 hours on the morning of 9 August 1942. USS *Blue* is alongside *Canberra*'s port bow, whilst USS *Patterson* can be seen approaching from astern. From *Canberra*'s 819-strong ship's company, 84 men were killed (74 during the battle; ten dying later from wounds), and another 109 were wounded. (USNHHC)



'The reserve from the 5th Marines was fed into the fight. Artillerymen from the 5th Battalion, 11th Marines, as they had on the previous night, fired their 105mm howitzers at any called target. The range grew as short as 1,600 yards from tube to impact.

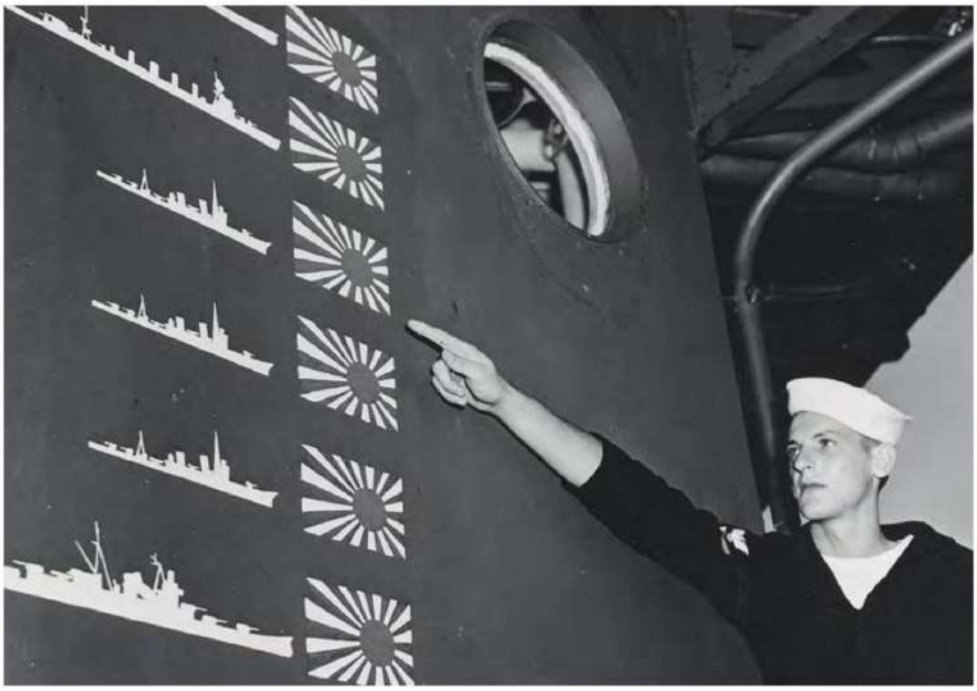
'The Japanese finally could take no more. They pulled back as dawn approached. On the slopes of the ridge and in the surrounding jungle they left more than 600 bodies; another 600 men were wounded. The remnants of the Kawaguchi force staggered back toward their lines to the west.'[2] Edison's Ridge had acquired another name – Bloody Ridge.

Ships of Task force 17 manoeuvring to avoid Japanese air attack early in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands on 26 October 1942. Among the vessels in this view are the USS *Hornet* and USS *Northampton*. (USNHHC)

THE BATTLE OF HENDERSON FIELD

The remnants of Kawaguchi's force escaped through the jungle, scavenging for anything edible. Many starved to death. Yet, even now the Americans' hold on Guadalcanal was far from secure. Reinforcements and supply ships had to sail vast distances to this remote island, with Japanese warships still in large numbers in the region and their aircraft, flying virtually unchallenged from Rabaul, an ever-present danger. The sinking of the carrier USS *Wasp* and the destroyer *O'Brien* by the Japanese submarine *I-19* on 15 September was an all-too egregious indicator of those dangers.

The Japanese faced similar obstacles, and it was apparent that the struggle for Guadalcanal would hinge on which side could reinforce the fastest. The Japanese had finally realised that the Americans were on Guadalcanal in considerable strength and that they could only be driven off the island by a very large force. They planned, consequently, to land 17,500 troops to join those remaining on what the disease-ridden, ill-nourished soldiers called 'Starvation Island'. Of a total of 9,000 troops who had been sent to the island, 2,000 were dead and 5,000 too crippled by illness and exhaustion to be capable of offensive action. The new operation against Henderson Field was to be led by Lieutenant General Harukichi Hyakutake.



Sailor W.R. Martin points out Japanese trophy flags painted on the pilothouse of the light cruiser USS *Boise*. The flags represent Japanese ships claimed sunk in the Battle of Cape Esperance, 11-12 October 1942. The six Japanese ships (two heavy cruisers, a light cruiser and three destroyers) represented in this scoreboard greatly overstates the actual enemy losses, which were one heavy cruiser (*Furutaka*) and one destroyer (*Fubuki*) sunk and one heavy cruiser (*Aoba*) badly damaged. (US Navy)

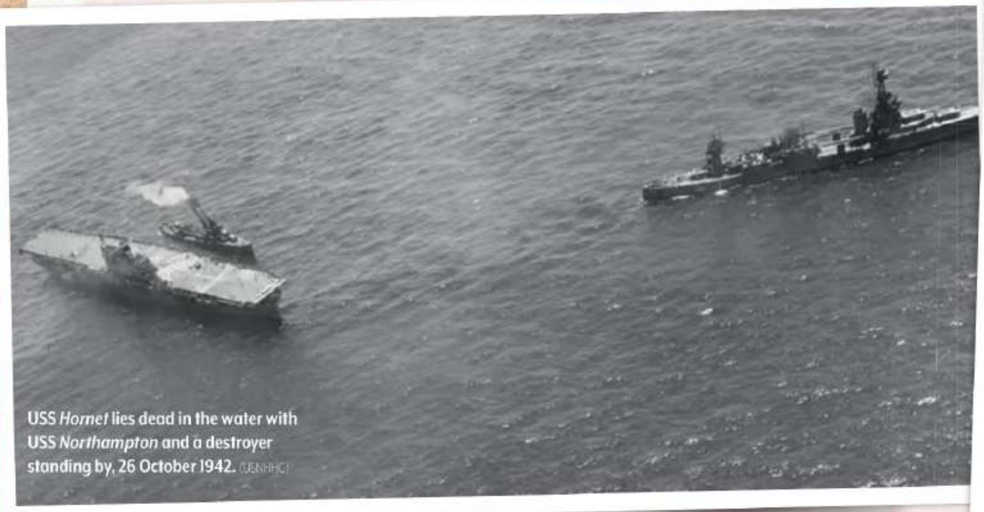
Throughout the following weeks, both sides tried to reinforce and resupply their troops on Guadalcanal. By mid-October the Japanese believed they were in a position to be able to take Henderson Field by a coordinated air, ground and sea assault. These destructive attacks would cover landings of tanks, heavy guns and fresh troops to take the airfield.

On the night of 11/12 October, Japanese naval forces, bound for bombarding the airfield, encountered an American force in the inconclusive Battle of Cape Esperance. On the following night of 13/14 October, Japanese cruisers and battleships shelled Henderson Field, destroying dozens of aircraft and fuel stores.

Pharmacist's Mate 1st Class Louis Ortega was there that night: 'It started about 11 pm on 13 October 1942. We were laying down in our pillbox. A whistling noise and then boom! "What the hell was that?" And then another one. For the next 4 hours we were bombarded by four battleships and two cruisers. Let me tell you something ... A battleship can sit there for hour after hour and throw 14-inch shells. I will never forget those four hours. The next morning when they stopped shelling, there was a haze over the whole area. Five miles of coconut groves were gone! Where the day before you had miles and miles of coconut trees, now 5 square miles were wiped clean. Every tree was gone. The airfield was destroyed. And over on Point Cruz you could see six Japanese transport ships merrily unloading troops.'[3]

It was hoped that this destructive bombardment would have put Henderson Field out of action, giving Hyakutake's men a chance to approach the Marine's positions without fear of being spotted or attacked

A Japanese bomb explodes off the port side of USS *Enterprise* during the during the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, 26 October 1942. (USNHHC)



USS *Hornet* lies dead in the water with USS *Northampton* and a destroyer standing by, 26 October 1942. (USNHHC)

The Japanese cargo ship *Kinugawa Maru* beached and sunk on the Guadalcanal shore, November 1943. She had been sunk by US aircraft on 15 November 1942, while attempting to deliver men and supplies to Japanese forces holding the northern part of the island. (USNHHC)

from above. Hyakutake saw that the best chance of success would be a night attack from the south, while the 17th Army artillery commander, General Sumiyoshi, would shell the perimeter and then launch a diversionary strike with infantry from the west. Hyakutake therefore despatched Lieutenant General Maruyama with 7,000 men to hack a path through the jungle, thereby putting himself in a position to launch an offensive from the south on 22 October.

The exhausting 35-mile slog through dense jungle in almost continual rain, took Maruyama two days longer than expected, and he had to discard much of his heavy weaponry on the way. But Sumiyoshi was unaware of this and opened his attack at dusk on 23 October, to find the Americans, who had detected increased activity in their front, ready and prepared. The tank and infantry attacks at the mouth of the Matanikau river were repulsed with relative ease by 12 batteries of US artillery. All the Japanese light tanks were destroyed and as dawn broke the following morning, the sandbar on the river was a clog of burnt out tanks and bodies.

The Japanese attacks continued, with 82 bombers and fighters from the 11th Air Fleet and from the aircraft carriers *Junyō* and *Hiyō* attacking Henderson Field in six waves throughout the day. Finally, at 14.00 hours on 24 October, Maruyama's men began to deploy for their attack. Earlier, Maruyama had told his soldiers: 'This is the decisive battle between Japan and the United States, a battle in which the rise or fall of the Japanese Empire will be decided.'

But as the afternoon wore on, the rain fell again, delaying the Japanese approach and causing chaos in the enemy ranks, men already exhausted from the arduous march through the jungle. Nevertheless, Maruyama attacked, and attacked again and again throughout the night but the firepower of the Marines was simply too great. At dawn, he called back his men to regroup.

Maruyama attacked again at 20.00 hours that evening, repeating the pattern of attack used the previous night. Despite some gains, the outcome was the same as before. The Japanese had been well and truly beaten. At 08.00 hours on the 26th, Hyakutake called off any further attacks and ordered his forces to retreat.

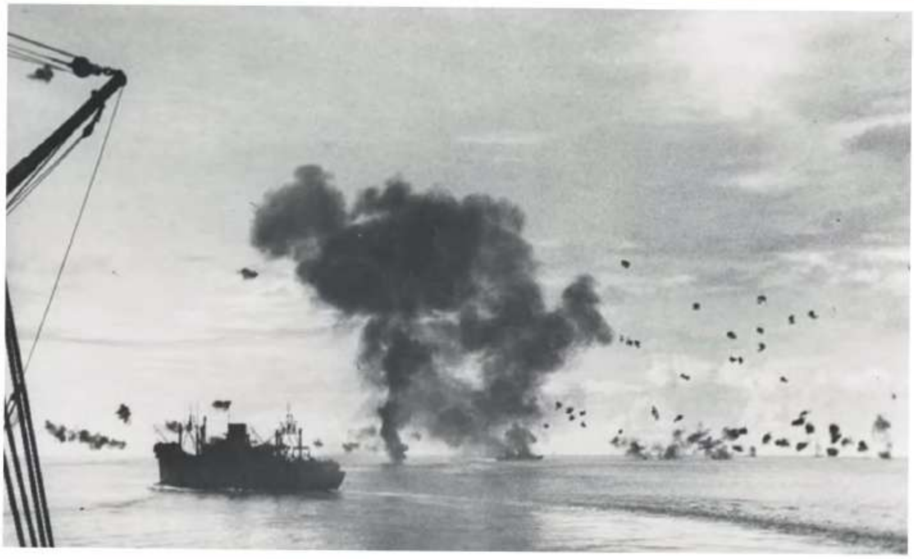
BATTLE OF THE SANTA CRUZ ISLANDS

It must have been evident to the Japanese Imperial Staff that they were never going to be able to drive the Americans from Guadalcanal. They had already lost heavily in terms of soldiers, aircrew and aircraft, and to continue to attack the United States' air, sea and ground forces would be to lose yet more irreplaceable men and machines. But continue they did, planning to undertake a major ground offensive on Guadalcanal for 20–25 October. In support of this a very large naval force – which included three fleet and one light carrier, four battleships and ten cruisers and 25 destroyers – was to be committed which, it was hoped, would overwhelm the Allied warships in the area.

Those US warships, comprising the *Hornet* and *Enterprise* task groups, under the overall command of Rear Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, were vastly inferior to those of the enemy except in one regard, that of aircraft. Supplementing the air groups on the two carriers were the aircraft based at Henderson Field, which highlighted the importance of that air base.

Search planes from the opposing fleets spotted their respective adversaries on the morning of 26 October. Both sides rushed to get their strike groups in the air at roughly the

USS *Hornet* under attack on the morning of 26 October 1942, during the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands. One of the Japanese aircraft struck the carrier's stack and then her flight deck. (NARA)



The attack transport USS *President Jackson* under Japanese air attack during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, 12 November 1942. The column of smoke is from a Japanese aircraft that had just crashed into the superstructure of USS *San Francisco*, which is steaming away in the right centre. (USNHHC)

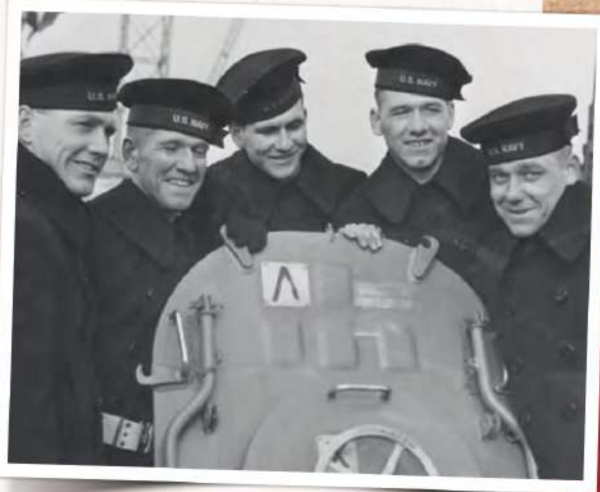
same time and, indeed, the opposing air groups actually passed within sight of each other as they headed for their targets. Both US and Japanese bombers broke through the defensive combat patrols to attack the enemy ships.

The carrier *Shōkaku* was hit by at least three bombs, which wrecked her flight deck and caused serious damage to the interior of the ship. The heavy cruiser *Chikuma* was also hit.

The Japanese bombers and torpedo bombers struck *Hornet*, which was also hit by two deliberately aimed aircraft which slammed into the carrier – a foretaste of the horrifying kamikaze attacks soon to be a feature of the war in the Pacific. *Hornet* was abandoned and sunk by torpedoes on 27 October.

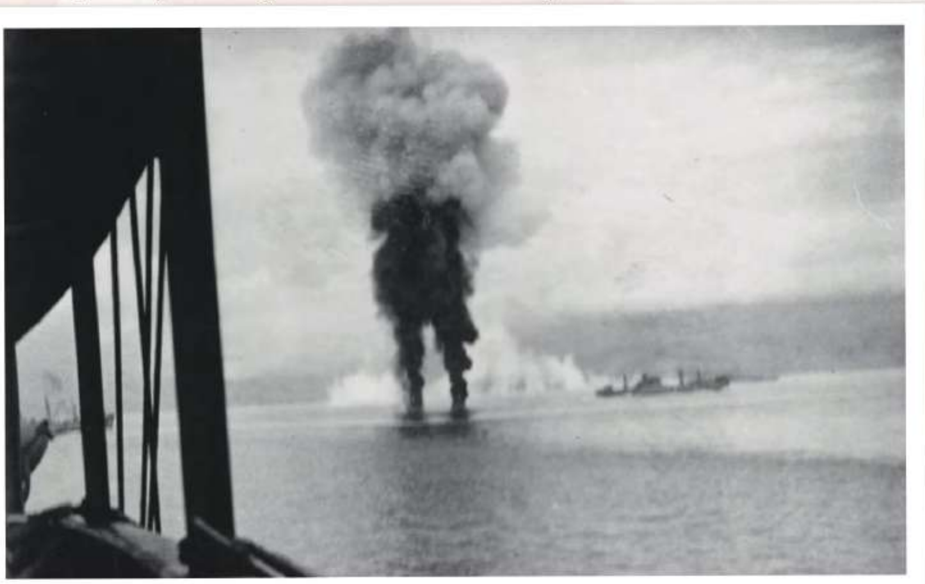
The Japanese had undoubtedly won the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands but, much more importantly, the damage to *Shōkaku* meant that they had only one carrier available to support their ground troops attempting to wrest control of Guadalcanal from the Marines. It was not enough to combat the aircraft at Henderson Field, and though there was one final naval encounter, the naval Battle of Guadalcanal, on 12-15 November, Japanese hopes of recovering Guadalcanal were effectively over.

The Japanese forces on Guadalcanal, Hyakutake's 17th Army, withdrew to the west coast of the island where they established defensive positions which the Marines did not attempt to penetrate. Finally accepting defeat, throughout 1 to 7 February 1943, the Japanese withdrew their remaining forces from the island. Their withdrawal was conducted admirably, and they escaped without being detected. Such was the secrecy of the operation, for a while the Americans did not know that they had won and that they were alone on the island.



The light cruiser USS *Juneau* was torpedoed and sunk by the Japanese submarine *I-26* on 13 November 1942, during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. There was a great explosion, following which *Juneau* broke in two and sunk in just twenty seconds. Some 100 members of the crew survived the sinking but were left to fend for themselves in the open ocean for eight days before rescuers belatedly started to reach the scene. While awaiting rescue, all but ten men died from the elements and shark attacks. Among the victims of the torpedo attack and subsequent wait for help were five brothers. Seen here at the time of *Juneau*'s commissioning are, left to right, Joseph, Francis, Albert, Madison and George Sullivan. (USNHHC)

Though the Japanese had recovered some 13,000 survivors, the battle had been an extremely costly and futile endeavour, having cost them 50,000 men lost on land, at sea, and in the air. It was, though, the loss of 600 aircraft and their aircrew which was to have the greatest impact upon the future course of the war in the Pacific.



The Naval Battle of Guadalcanal rages on. Smoke rises from two Japanese aircraft shot down during an attack on U.S. ships off Guadalcanal on 12 November 1942. Photographed from USS *President Adams*, the warship on the right is the attack cargo ship USS *Betelgeuse*, whilst that to the left, barely visible through *President Adams*' structure, is another attack cargo ship, USS *Libra*. (NARA)

NOTES

1. Quoted in Richard B. Frank, *Guadalcanal, The Definitive Account of the Landmark Battle* (Penguin, London, 1992), pp.112-3.
2. Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *First Offensive: The Marine Campaign for Guadalcanal* (Marines in World War II Commemorative Series).
3. Excerpt from *With the Marines at Guadalcanal*, a US Naval History and Heritage Command Oral History.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

The defeats at Coral Sea, Midway and Guadalcanal had wrecked Japan's strategic plans, but more disasters were to follow.

Over many lands within or bordering the Pacific Ocean, the flag of the Empire of the Sun fluttered peacefully above the nations of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. True there were almost continuous guerrilla actions in the remoter regions of the Philippines and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists refused to be beaten but, apart from on its distant edges, Hirohito's empire stood seemingly secure and strong. But it was built on flimsy foundations that had already been weakened at the Coral Sea and then severely shaken at Midway and Guadalcanal.

It was the latter which marked the end of the Japanese offensive surge. 'For those who were there,' wrote one American who was, 'Guadalcanal is not a name but an emotion, recalling desperate fights in the air, furious night naval battles, frantic work at supply or construction, savage fighting in the sodden jungle, nights broken by screaming bombs and deafening explosions of naval shells.'[1]

Both the Allies and the Japanese had lost heavily in men and materiel in the battles of the first year of the war in the Pacific, but the land of the free and the home of the brave could sustain those losses far easier than that of the Rising Sun. And another empire, that upon which the sun would never set, was determined to regain its poise and restore its pride.

INTO THE ARAKAN

After the retreat from Burma, Wavell had reorganised the forces on the Indian border, creating XV Corps, placing Lieutenant General William Slim in charge, as part of the Eastern Army under the command of Lieutenant General Noel Irwin. Wavell was keen to demonstrate that the British were not a spent force and he sought to return to the offensive as soon as was practicable. Slim, though, would not be the one to direct the upcoming campaign, at least not at first.

The first objective of the operation was Akyab Island in the Arakan region of Burma. This, wisely, was a very limited objective, but it had a port and an all-weather airfield, both of which would

As the weeks and months passed since Pearl Harbor and the invasion of Malaya in 1941, the Allies' strength gradually increased in the Pacific – as the Japanese discovered to their cost. An example of that growing offensive capability, particularly on the part of the US forces, is seen here. This is the wreck of the Japanese destroyer *Kikuzuki* beached in Purvis Bay in the Soloman Islands. Sunk on 4 May 1942, during a raid by aircraft from USS *Yorktown*, *Kikuzuki* was salvaged by the US Navy in 1943, when this picture was taken. (USNHHC)

provide good launching pads from further offensives into Burma. Its recapture would also send a strong message to the Japanese that the British were far from beaten.

To invade Akyab would require vessels to carry the troops across from the mainland and five motor launches, 72 landing craft and three paddle steamers were made available. Expectations were high as it was known that the whole of the Arakan front was held by just two Japanese battalions.

To begin with, things went well, the Japanese withdrawing as the 14th Indian Division, commanded by Major General Wilfrid Lewis Lloyd, advanced down the Mayu Peninsula along the few bridle paths which ran along the steep jungle-clad hills.

However, the Japanese 55th Division, less one regiment, was transferred to the Arakan, and the easy victory which had been envisaged began to disappear amidst the dense jungle to which the Japanese had become so quickly adapted.

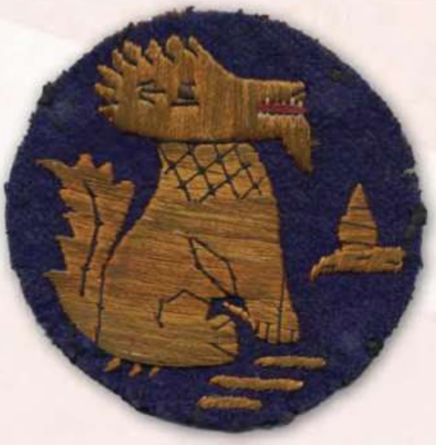
The first battle with the Japanese was on 7 January 1943, when the 47th Indian Infantry Brigade attacked a strong defensive position which the enemy had constructed across a narrow strip of land between the sea and the hills. The attack failed, due to the Indian troops being unable to locate the enemy's machine guns and mortars hidden in the dense foliage. 'One could stare at the Jap line for hours on end with binoculars,' complained an officer of the 9th Jat Regiment, 'and scarcely see a thing move or a leaf displaced'.

The 47th Brigade was relieved by the 55th Indian Brigade and a second attack, supported by six tanks, was made on 1 February. Again, the attack failed, with two of the tanks being ditched and another two knocked out. Subsequent attacks were also repelled, and Irwin suggested that Lloyd should desist from

Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell, C-in-C India, was a great supporter of the then Brigadier Wingate. Here he is seen with officers of the Chindits. Brigadier Wingate is on the extreme right on the eve of the first expedition into the Burmese jungle. (Colin Higgs)

any further assaults and to hold the ground already won. Wavell disagreed: 'I refused to accept this recommendation and to take up a defensive attitude without first obtaining a marked success over the enemy, so that the troops should be confident of their ability to beat the Japanese.'[2] It was not to be.

Supplies being parachuted down to the Chindits as they made their way through some of the most difficult country in the world. (Colin Higgs)



The Chindit badge worn by Corporal George Edward Archer during his service in the 2nd Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey), which participated in the Chindit expeditions. The name of the Chindits originated from a suggestion by Captain Aung Thin DSO of the Burma Rifles and was based on the Burmese mythical beast Chinthé, or Chinthya, statues of which guard Buddhist temples. (James Luto Collection)

Having beaten off every British attack, the Japanese then counter-attacked. When Lloyd ordered his troops to pull back to avoid being surrounded, the order was countermanded by Irwin, and Lloyd was relieved of his command. Lloyd was proven correct. The Japanese crossed the supposedly uncrossable Mayu Range, overran the British 6th Brigade Headquarters, killed its commanding officer, and cut the coastal track which was the only practical escape route for the 14th Division. The 47th Brigade had, quite literally, to take to the hills, abandoning its heavy equipment as it fled the attempted Japanese encirclement. Slim was ordered to take control of the operation but there was little he could do to retrieve the situation, and the British withdrew into India.

The campaign was a disaster, and Irwin was dismissed. The British had shown, nevertheless, that they were fighting back, and this was emphasised with another operation of which they could boast some success to mitigate the Arakan failings. This was the first Chindit expedition.

OPERATION LOINCLOTH

Wavell wished to demonstrate that the British soldier was every bit as capable as his Japanese counterpart and Brigadier Orde Wingate's 77th Indian Brigade was going to do just that by penetrating deep into Japanese territory. The objective of Operation *Loincloth* was to enter Burma and cut the main railway line between Mandalay and Myitkyina.

The expedition accordingly crossed the Chindwin on the night of 13 February 1943.

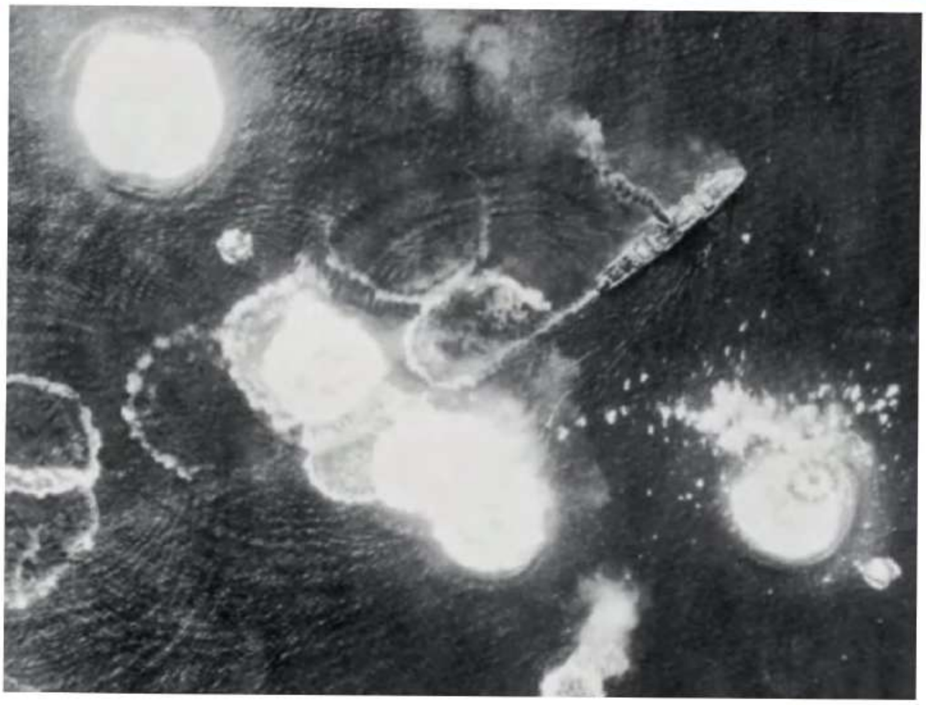
A patrol of General Wingate's Chindits crossing a stream many miles behind the Japanese lines in the picturesque surroundings of Northern Burma. It may look like a peaceful scene, but there were Japanese troops within a few miles of this spot when the picture was taken. (Colin Higgs)

"We shall not stop for you, for our very lives may be jeopardized by waiting for stragglers."

They moved off in seven columns, each of which was self-contained with pack transport, and equipped with machine guns and mortars. There was no artillery, and supply was by local purchase and from the air.

This, the first of the Long Range Penetration Groups, known as Chindits because of their shoulder flashes which had as their motif the imaginary Chinthé lion, statues of which were often seen at the entrance to Burmese pagodas, was composed of just ordinary soldiers. But the men had received training along the lines of special forces, with emphasis on unarmed combat, jungle craft, physical training, ambush, and demolition.

Wingate drove his men on remorselessly. 'You have to diagnose your own complaints and then cure yourselves,' he told them. 'We shall not stop for you, for our very lives may be jeopardized by waiting for stragglers. If you are sick, you are of no use to us – you are an unwanted liability. We shall leave you to effect your own salvation.' Many were unable to effect their own salvation, and about one-third of the force that entered Burma was lost.



A Japanese transport ship under aerial attack in the Bismarck Sea, 3 March 1943. (Australian War Memorial; 128159)

Though blurred, this still from a piece of film footage shows the 30 Squadron RAAF Beaufighter flown by Flight Lieutenant R.F. Uren attacking a Japanese transport during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, 3 March 1943. (Australian War Memorial; 127967)

Flight Lieutenant R.F. Uren, in the cockpit of his Beaufighter, takes a drink from a water bottle after leaving the target area during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, 3 March 1943. (Australian War Memorial; 127968)

The Japanese transport *Taimei Maru* bracketed by bombs during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. (Australian War Memorial; 141997)

The expedition, however, was a success. The Chindits reached the railway, demolishing four bridges and blasting the side of a gorge sending thousands of tons of rock down on the line. In total, the line was cut in more than 70 places.

The operation had no strategic value, but the message it sent out, to both Allied and enemy soldiers, was an unmistakably important one – properly trained and well led troops could fight in the jungle just as well as the Japanese.

BATTLE OF THE BISMARCK SEA

Another clear message was sent in the first week of March 1943. Ever since MacArthur's bold boast that he would return to the Philippines, as Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the South-west Pacific Area, he had seen New Guinea – the second largest island in the world – as a key stepping-stone in his advance across the Pacific towards Manila. The Japanese had been prevented from taking Port Moresby, but the enemy's presence at Rabaul in neighbouring New Britain posed an ever-present threat to Allied forces in New Guinea.

The Japanese were, of course, well aware of the importance of New Guinea having previously attempted to capture Port Moresby, and Imperial Headquarters sought once again to take control of the island. The first move in this operation took place on 5 January 1943, with the despatch of the 20th Division from Rabaul to land on the northwest coast of New Guinea.

Through intercepts of Japanese communications, the Allies had learnt of their intention to invade New Guinea. Consequently, the USAAF and the Royal Australian Air Force were ready and prepared. The Japanese convoy carrying the invading force, consisting of five destroyers and five troop transports protected overhead by Zeros, was spotted by Allied aircraft as it crossed the Bismarck Sea between New Britain and Papua New Guinea.

The Allies promptly attacked. In the ensuing battle, the Allied pilots claimed to have shot down 69 enemy aircraft for the loss of just ten of their own, as well as sinking one of the transports and forcing another to beach itself after being severely damaged.

More troops were sent from Rabaul on 19 January and 20 February, but the next major move was to be that of the headquarters of the Japanese XVIII Army and the main body of the 51st Division from Rabaul to Lae on the New Guinea coast. Lae is the second largest city in New Guinea, with one of the largest ports, and was the place that MacArthur had earmarked as his base for operations against Rabaul. Every effort was going to be made to stop the Japanese convoy, but an enormous effort had been made against the convoy in the 5 January attack – hundreds of sorties had been flown, yet only two ships had been hit – so new tactics were needed.

High level bombing was the standard Air Corps method, but experience had shown that it was highly inaccurate. This was to be changed to 'mast level' bombing, with the bombers attacking below 500 feet to release their bombs so that they struck the side of the enemy vessels rather than the topside. In addition, 'asymmetric' attacks were to be made from different heights and different directions so that the Japanese ships could not employ their usual methods of evasion and to lessen the effectiveness of their anti-aircraft gunners.

Pictured in front of his P-38 Lightning, Captain Robert L. Faurot was serving in the 39th Fighter Squadron during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. His unit was assigned the task of providing 'top cover' for a flight of B-17s. When the bombers were 'bounced' by about 30 Zeros, the 39th dove into the fray to protect them. In the ensuing aerial battle three P-38s and one B-17 did not return. Among that number was Captain Faurot. (NARA)

Some of the crew of USS *Salt Lake City* examine shrapnel or splinter holes in the outboard catwalk of the cruiser's starboard catapult after the battle. During the engagement, *Salt Lake City* fired 806 armour-piercing projectiles, followed by twenty-six high-capacity explosive shells after the supply of the former was exhausted. (USNHHC)

Crewmen of USS *Salt Lake City* hunting for shell fragment souvenirs on their ship's main deck after the Battle of the Komandorski Islands. (USNHHC)

THE BURNING TRANSPORTS

The Japanese convoy, which had set off from Simpson Harbour in Rabaul, was composed of eight troop transports and eight destroyers defended by 100 fighters. Waiting for it were 114 bombers and 54 fighters. The Allied aircraft first struck on 2 March in the Bismarck Sea, sinking one transport and damaging two others. The real slaughter took place the following day. No less than six more transports and four destroyers were sunk, as well as 20 Japanese fighters being destroyed.

'The Bismarck Sea battle was the best show I've ever seen in the southwest Pacific,' Major Richard Bong told a reporter of the *Sunday Times-Signal*. 'It certainly was decisive enough on our side anyway … We took the [B-25] Mitchells in for the first true low-level shipping assault they ever made and we were mixed up in combat right then and through the whole show. The only thing I saw were eight transports burning at one time – but that was enough to convince me that joining the air force was the best thing I ever did.'

Lieutenant Garret Middlebrook, a co-pilot in one of the Mitchells, described the effect of the B-25s' attacks on one of the Japanese troop ships: 'What I saw looked like little sticks, maybe a foot long or something like that, or splinters flying up off the deck of ship; they'd fly all around … and twist crazily in the air and fall out in the water. Then I realized what I was watching were human beings. I was watching hundreds of those Japanese just blown off the deck by those machine-guns. They just splintered around the air like sticks in a whirlwind and they'd fall in the water.'[3] Approximately 3,000 Japanese soldiers and sailors perished, all for the loss of just 13 Allied aircraft and their crews.

THE TABLES WERE TURNING

By this stage of the war it had become evident that the Allies had firm control of the air as well as the sea in the Pacific, and that the Japanese could no longer mount offensive operations. Simply reinforcing or resupplying their more distant garrisons would entail the running of great risks. Even the most optimistic Japanese officer must have accepted deep in his heart that his country could no longer expect to win the war in the Pacific. The combined industrial might of the Allied nations far outweighed that of Japan, even more so in terms of population.

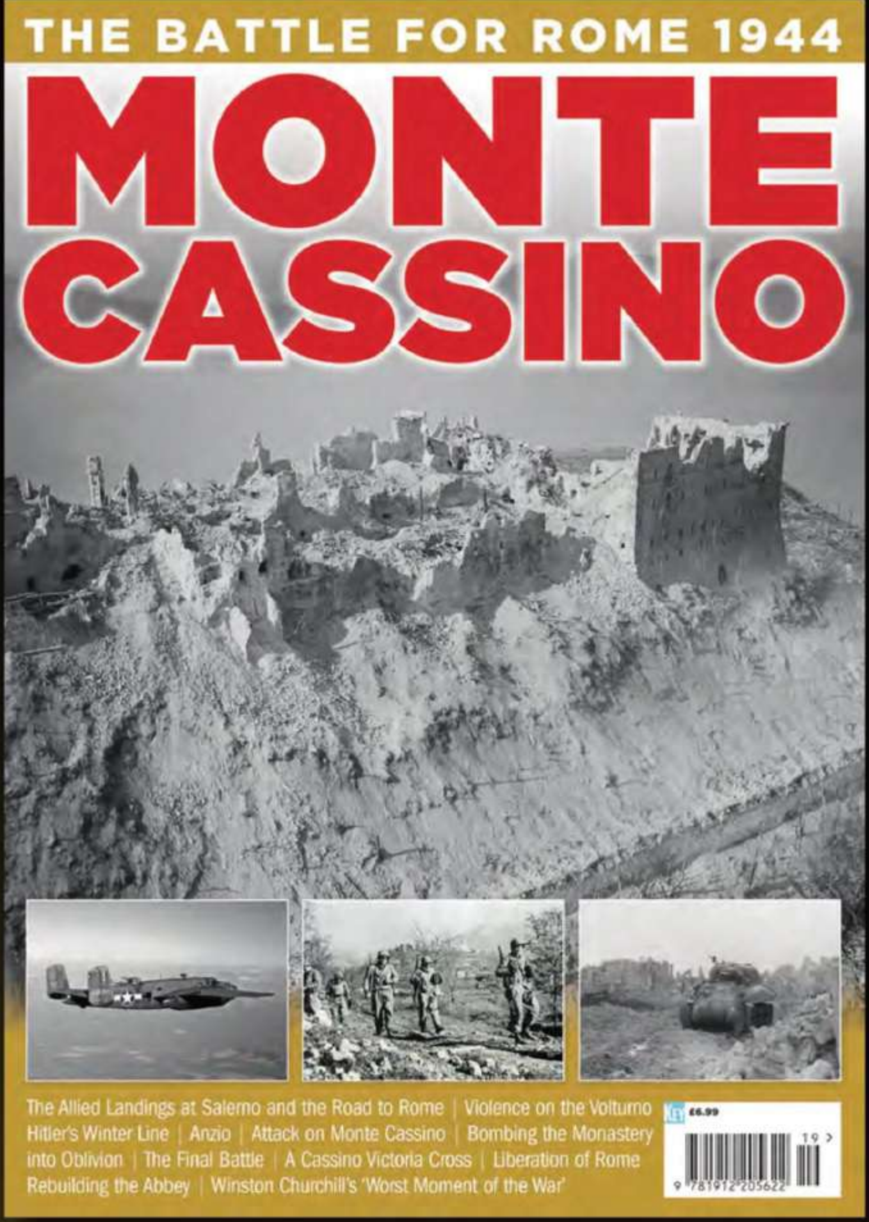
It had been hoped in Tokyo that the war in the East would have been won in 1942, but rather than seek to negotiate with the Emperor, the Allies now sought only to defeat Japan, with every degree of ruthless determination as the Japanese had shown. The Battle of the Bismarck Sea marked the end of the beginning in the war in the Pacific, and though there were two more years of horrific fighting to come, it was clear that it also signalled the beginning of the end for Japan.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Winston Churchill, Volume V, pp.20-1.
2. Grehan and Mace, *The Fall of Burma*, p.115.
3. Eric M. Bergerud, *Fire in the Sky: The Air War in the South Pacific* (Westview Press, Boulder, 2000), p.592.

At around the same time that Allied forces were engaging the enemy in the south Pacific, at the opposite end of the theatre US warships engaged their Japanese counterparts in the Battle of the Komandorski Islands. The battle, a daylight surface engagement fought south of the Soviet Komandorski Islands on 27 March 1943, saw an inferior American force escape complete destruction. This picture shows USS *Salt Lake City*, a cruiser we have encountered numerous times on the previous pages, in action during the battle. An enemy salvo has just fallen astern. (USNHHC)

THE BATTLE FOR ROME 1944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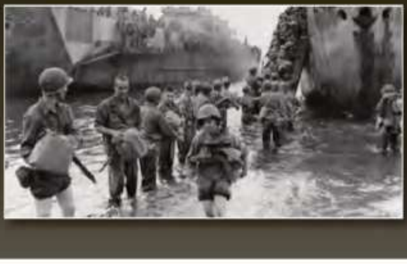

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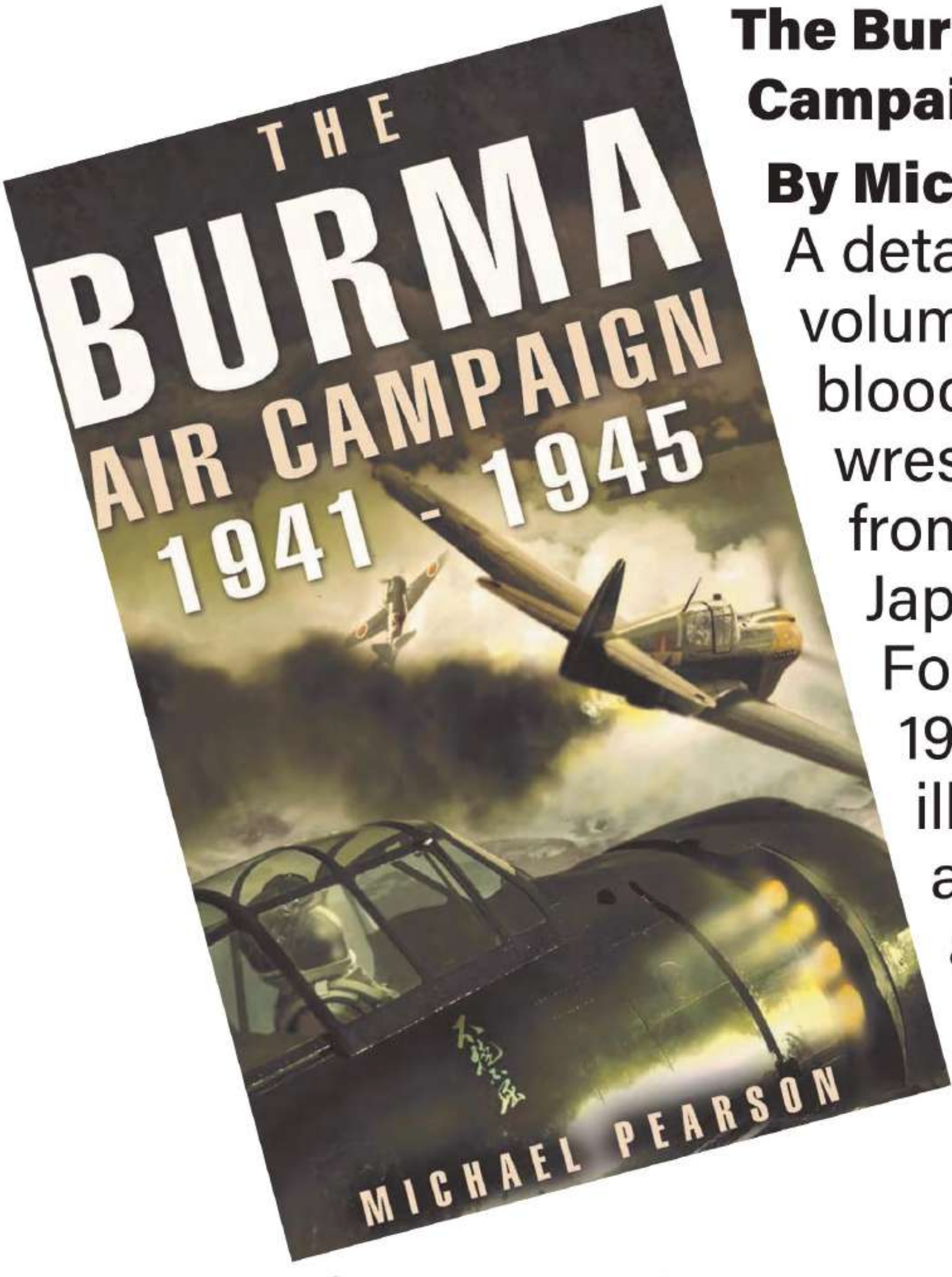

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